PATRONAGE AND COMMUNITY AGENCY IN EARLY CHRISTIAN ICONOGRAPHY. THE EVIDENCE FROM THREE TUNISIAN MOSAICS.

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"Vita enim mortuorum in memoria vivorum est posita."

Cicero, *Philippic IX*

Memoria ad patrem meum

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ABSTRACT

This thesis applies a holistic approach to analyse the iconography of three early Christian Tunisian mosaics. These fifth-century monuments comprise the baptism font located in the Felix basilica, in Demna, and the *Ecclesia Mater* and deacon Crescentinus tomb mosaics, in the Chapel of the Martyrs, in Tabarka. These late-antique monuments are reproduced and mentioned in almost all early Christian art reference material, yet the conclusions about their meaning, patronage and the context of their production have not been revised or challenged, for the most part, since they were first published. Further, their role in shaping individual Christian experience has not been questioned. These artistic productions reveal much about the communities involved in their production, yet research thus far has focused on the unavoidable topics one encounters when studying North Africa between the fourth and sixth centuries; namely Donatism, Vandal invasions and rule, as well as the Justinian re-conquest, martyrs, martyrdom and sainthood. In addition, there remains the difficulty in establishing site chronology in North African Roman provinces such as Africa Proconsularis. The importance of context in the interpretation of early Christian iconography cannot be underestimated.

After a discussion on the best way to approach the problem of early Christian art, this thesis considers the complex baptistery iconography of the Demna baptism font mosaic, and proposes a new, cohesive, interpretation based on comparisons to the Neonian and Arian baptistery dome mosaics in Ravenna, which previous interpretations failed to achieve. After proposing a new chronology for the Felix basilica and its baptistery, the discussion focuses on replacing the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic in its immediate, local context in order to best interpret its imagery and the meaning behind its enigmatic epitaph. In addition, the treatment of the basilica shown in Chapel of the Martyrs mosaic is replaced within a long-standing pictorial tradition. Finally, the iconography of the Crescentinus mosaic is examined in terms of the status granted to the deceased by both the patron and the community. Imagery and epitaph are discussed side by side and reveal whether the deacon died as a martyr, as a saint, or whether he was merely venerated as such. This interpretation is made possible by introducing imagery of the wreath or crown, of the Hand of God (*Dextera Dei*) and *apotheosis* and *decursio*. The agency of patrons, ecclesiastical authorities and community is introduced and the imagery and inscriptions are discussed in terms of their context.

INTRODUCTION

> The placement of virtually all ornamentation, including all the figural decoration, inside the Early Christian church was a reversal of the pattern in Greco-Roman religious architecture, but the motivation was the same. The audience for visual narratives in pagan societies was outside the temple, and the sculptures in the pediments and friezes faced outwards so that the worshippers could read their pictorial messages. The audience for Early Christian figural art was inside the building, in the nave and facing the apse, and that is where the decorators of churches situated their mosaics and frescoes.[1]

Early Christians expressed themselves through their relationship with God. Visually, this was translated through the use of complex iconography, and closely associated with ritual and commemorative contexts. More than any other visual medium in late-antique North Africa, pavement mosaics framed Christian experiences and articulated ecclesiastical and personal messages. These pavements were included within the Christian sanctuary and became woven into each individual's experience of their faith. Mosaic was an expensive but durable artistic medium, the presence of which suggests a high level of artistic patronage.[2] In general, these images informed viewers about broad Christian themes, but more specifically they reveal clues about the patron, congregation, clergy and the deceased. This is because the people involved in the production of these monuments carefully chose what to depict and what to write, or not write, in inscriptions and epitaphs.[3] The mosaics discussed herein frame the individual Christian experience of the time, from initiation to death. More importantly for the modern viewer, they offer a glimpse of how early Christians created their artistic narrative.

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[1] Kleiner 2007, 301
[2] Mackie 2003, 232
[3] For more on inscriptions and evidence of patronage, see Caillet 1993

Since the catacombs were rediscovered in Rome in the sixteenth century, the Eternal City has been the main focus of study in early Christian art. There emerged in the Roman funeral setting an artistic style and symbolism intended for a Christian audience, its variations sometimes as subtle as a simple shift in context. Roman art was rife with message-bearing imagery, and even people of modest means might interact with art on a personal basis daily, being confronted with large monuments and images or through a more intimate interaction, for example with personal adornment and worship. Recent publications demonstrate that the debate is still very much alive around Roman artistic identity, production, viewership, reception and patronage.[4] With the discovery, in the 1920s, of a fully illustrated synagogue in the Roman garrison city of Dura Europos, there was renewed interest in both early Christian and Jewish art. This surprising data completely reversed previous interpretations about Jewish art and led to the first watershed study on Jewish art and its influence on early Christian art.[5] The bulk of recent archaeological discoveries attributed to Late Antiquity were made across what were once Roman provinces.

The importance of Africa in shaping Christianity cannot be underestimated. Once established, the early Church saw in North Africa a most organized and intellectually prolific entity, despite persecution and schism. Scholarly interest in urban and rural communities of North Africa has, alongside its funerary landscapes, steadily increased.[6]

The following chapters analyse the iconography of three fifth-century Tunisian early Christian mosaics: the baptism font mosaic from the Felix basilica, in Demna, and the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic and the Crescentinus mosaic, both from the Chapel of the Martyrs, in Tabarka. These mosaics are totems of early Christian art in North Africa and are mentioned in most of the discipline's reference works. Yet, scholarship has not re-scrutinised these monuments using modern social and art historical methodologies, which acknowledge previous authorial bias and seek a more objective analysis of material evidence. These monuments lend

[4] Elsner 2003 and 2007
[5] Goodenough 1943 and 1953
[6] Leone 2007; Downs 2007; Yasin 2005; Ghalia 2002; Grey 2011

themselves to review because they present with a complex iconography and intriguing inscriptions that belie deliberate choices on the part of their creators. Moreover, their related scholarship carries enough information upon which to expand. The principal challenges when studying Late Antiquity in North Africa, most notably between the fourth and sixth centuries, relate to chronology. Anna Leone suggests that unless stratigraphy is carefully established during excavation, fifth-century layers are difficult to define and analyse, as previous digs destroyed or poorly recorded evidence present in these layers, in order to access early Christian or Roman levels.[7] Despite scientific advances, coins and ceramics remain the best evidence on which to establish chronology, yet because these items were used for indeterminate periods of time, dating still remains complex.[8]

The first chapter comments on the state of early Christian baptistery studies. Two broad themes emerge from a review of scholarship, highlighting the lack of an integrated approach across the discipline. Scholars have either focused on the structural elements of baptisteries, or on baptistery iconography. The analysis of these methods suggests that the best process to follow to generate new information from a monument is to analyse it holistically, but not as an isolated artistic production. The case-study model offers the flexibility to individualise an approach for each monument and helps to present key arguments using a variety of disciplines. Consequently, the iconography here will be placed into a wider context of artistic production, through the introduction and discussion of comparanda that may not have been available when these mosaics were first studied, or that were simply overlooked by previous scholars. The available inscriptions are studied in tandem with the imagery, instead of being translated and analysed separately as had been the case before.

The second chapter focuses on the baptism font located in the Felix Basilica baptistery, discovered in Demna, in the Cap Bon region of Tunisia. Relocated to the Bardo museum, this kiosk-shaped structure was partly rebuilt to house the exceptionally well-

[7] Leone 2007, 129
[8] Leone 2007, 129

preserved, mosaic-lined baptism font it contained. Here I propose a new interpretation of the font mosaic's iconography. The strength of this original approach is that it explains the presence of every symbol and image on the mosaic, and locates them within a cohesive iconographic programme, which previous approaches and studies have failed to achieve. This interpretation also takes into account the structure and layout of the font and other external comparanda set aside by previous scholars.

The discussion in chapter three challenges the accepted relative chronology of the Felix basilica. Previous scholars maintained, with little materials and a more subjective interpretation of the evidence, that Vandal invasions and the Justinian re-conquest of North Africa led to a need to rebuild the basilica's baptism facilities during the sixth century. The only datable evidence found at the site consisted of a hoard of small coins, the burial context of which has not fully been explored. New discoveries in the region, and a modern revision of historical facts, strongly suggest that the basilica and the baptistery were both built during the fifth century, possibly under Vandal rule. Consequently, the local Christian community is identified here as its own agent of change.

The fourth chapter discusses the unique image of the *Ecclesia Mater* funeral mosaic, found in the Chapel of the Martyrs, in Tabarka. This mosaic portrays a basilica from many different points of view, simultaneously. Whilst scholars accept a more abstract and generic interpretation of the image, the discussion about comparanda demonstrates that the manner in which the basilica is depicted in the mosaic already sits within an established pictorial tradition. This reconsideration more clearly identifies what the image represents and how it might have been understood by contemporary viewers. The symbolic aspects of the image, supported by the succinct epitaph, further articulate how the deceased is accepted within the local congregation and exemplifies how Christians expressed their relationship to God and their local community.

The final chapter examines the iconography and elaborate epitaph of deacon Crescentinus' mosaic. Also found in the Chapel of the Martyrs, the unique illustration and wording on this tomb not only provide clues as to how early Christians conceived of the afterlife, but they also express the expectations of the congregation in relation to the deacon's

role in death. The tomb cover's iconography and epitaph confirm the deacon's standing in the community and convey the patron's (and by extension, the community's) wish that he be welcomed by God to enjoy a pleasant afterlife. My analysis of the iconography alongside the epitaph clarifies the ambiguity around whether Crescentinus died a martyr or a saint.

This thesis also discusses patronage, when possible. Patrons, whether laypersons or clergy, were compelled to make a statement about themselves or others and did so through the location or placement of the artwork they commissioned, and the imagery or wording it displayed. What we know about the mechanism behind patronage and the production of early Christian images during Late Antiquity in North Africa is limited. Donor inscriptions are found in monumental buildings as well as more modest churches from the fourth century, across the Mediterranean. These inscriptions "suggest the donor's privileged position as well as their participation in a reciprocal relationship with the saint" to whom the monument was dedicated.[9] Their presence fulfilled multiple purposes: to establish a patron's standing in the community, to secure a privileged relationship with the (presumably local) saint and in the case of funerary art, to commemorate the deceased. The location of these inscriptions and works of art within churches further suggests, at the very least, the involvement and approval of local ecclesiastical authorities, and some inscriptions even praise the bishop in his role as patron.[10] The involvement of ecclesiastical authorities is also confirmed through the use of certain formulae in inscriptions, for example.[11]

An example that further illustrates this connection is a fourth-century apse mosaic located in the basilica of Aquileia. The local bishop is understood to have acted as patron by using a large sum of money given by private donors to commission a marine-themed work.[12] In this case, the clergy acted as a rich villa owner would have done privately, by commissioning the artwork. In so doing, they altered the process of producing a secular mosaic to serve a religious context, as the imagery was more or less pagan. Still, the location

[9] Yasin 2009, 128-129
[10] Yasin 2009, 128
[11] Caillet 1993, 14
[12] For more on bishops and their role in early Christian communities, Grey 2011, 128-133

and context of the new work assigned it with a new Christian religious meaning. Crucially, because its meaning is so complex, this mosaic was also considered a deliberate compensation for the missing apse.[13] Although Beat Brenk argues that this commission should be considered unique because the bishop exercised a private choice, its inclusion in a church space affirms its religious function.[14] This demonstrates how bishops became the "unchallenged arbiters of elegance in the creation of church spaces", a role which benefitted them as well as the community they served.[15]

Although a seemingly random selection, these mosaics also offer the possibility to touch upon unavoidable topics and problems one encounters when studying Late Antiquity in North Africa. These issues are mainly related to the difficulty of establishing a site's chronology, enigmatic iconography that has thus far been studied as an isolated phenomenon and the expressed desire by previous scholars to link a site to every possible historical event that occurred in the region between the fourth and sixth centuries. Matters of martyrdom, Vandals and heresy are discussed in a modern historical and art historical framework. Ultimately, these mosaics conveyed a message that contributed to the viewer's experience and to a community's religious legacy, curated at least in part by the local ecclesiastical authorities. The aim here is to recreate the context of the art in question to gain a viewer's perspective and a more immediate sense of function and personal significance for these three artefacts that framed the beginning and end of the lives of these early Christians in North Africa.

Context is everything.[16]

NB: Unless specified, the dates mentioned herein refer to the Common Era (CE).

[13] Brenk 2010, 18
[14] Brenk 2010, 19
[15] MacCormack 2003, 271
[16] Clarke 2003, 13

Timeline and Main Issues

The more specific chronology of early North African Christian architecture remains problematic, because of a former propensity to align the region's chronology with its political past. This alignment is not reflected in the evidence, however. In fact, the changing political and religious fate of North Africa seem to have exerted little influence on church planning.[17] To add to this bias, the lack of inscriptions associated with the monuments themselves, the poor condition of some monuments and the small amount of epigraphy that survives have contributed to the difficulties in establishing the chronology of early Christian monuments. Dates were rarely included in dedicatory inscriptions, on pavement mosaics or carved in architectural features such as lintels.

North Africa was annexed as the Roman province Africa Proconsularis, after the fall of Carthage in 146 BCE, during the Third Punic war. Its territory more or less covered the areas of modern-day Tunisia, parts of Algeria and western Lybia. Caesar rebuilt Carthage in 49 BCE and it quickly became an important city in the Roman Empire. Africa Proconsularis provided Rome with grain, and also exported *garum*, olive oil and fruit. Though its prosperity relied mainly on agriculture, it was also known from the production of ARS (African Red Slip Pottery) and the provision of exotic animals. At the end of the third century, Diocletian separated the province into three smaller regions: Byzacena and Tripolitania in the South and Zeugitana in the north, still referred to as Africa Proconsularis.

North African Romans embraced Christianity early and with vigour. The first documentary evidence of this is *The Acts of the Scilitan Martyrs*, which is dated to 180 and thought to be the earliest Latin text in Church history. Authors such as Tertullian (155-240), Cyprian Bishop of Carthage (200-258) and Augustine Bishop of Hippo (354-430) not only shaped religious thought through their writings, but captured events that allowed a glimpse into their daily lives, as well as providing a record of persecutions and martyrdom. North

[17] Krautheimer 1965, 139

African Christianity was characterised by a particularly strong culture of martyr veneration that may have been the result of a multiplication of schisms and heresies, such as Donatism.

Discussions of Donatism are inevitable when studying Late Antiquity in North Africa. This schism was the result of internecine disagreements among Christians that originated in North Africa during the Diocletian persecutions (303-305). One of the goals of the Diocletianic persecutions was to destroy all copies of the Scriptures. To save their lives, some bishops and Church members relinquished their copies of the Scriptures to imperial authorities. These Christians were considered as having betrayed their faith and they became known as *traditores* or "the ones who had handed over". Others handed over worthless texts and were saved, while still others were martyred for refusing to hand over the sacred writings. When the persecutions ceased under Constantine in 306, questions were raised about how these *traditores* should be treated as some returned, or were elected to, positions of power within the Church. The selection of Caecilian as Bishop of Carthage, in 311, a known *traditor,* cemented the Donatist position. Donatists believed that the sacraments these restored members of the clergy carried out were ineffective and invalid, because these ministers were no longer pure for having betrayed their faith.

As the historical context of the persecutions faded away, the Donatist movement became progressively "centred on the issue of clerical holiness" and orthopraxy.[18] Those who observed the Nicene creed (non-heretics or Catholics) understood that the validity of a sacrament did not rely on the moral character of the man performing it, as he was merely a vessel for God's grace.[19] Yet Donatists insisted on the rebaptism of the *traditores*, to restore their purity and make them effective again. The idea of re-baptising someone was anathema to the Nicene Christians who recognized only one baptism, where God extended his grace to and through an imperfect man. Of course, each side of this procedural divide accused the other of operating outside its universal and true authority. Donatism takes its name from

[18] Vessey 2012, 378

[19] Ignatius used the term "Catholic" (107 CE) and it appears in the "Martyrdom of Polycarp", Bishop of Smyrna (155 CE). It was understood in terms of temporal and spatial "universality". Augustine then used it to differentiate between the "true" or Nicene creed Church and heretic groups.

Donatus Magnus, who was consecrated Bishop of Carthage in 313. The Council of Arles, in 314, confirmed the legitimacy of Caecilian's appointment and of the sacraments he had carried out. As well as declaring Donatism a heresy, the Council excommunicated Donatus and decided that *traditores* be deposed, but the sacraments they had carried out remained valid. It further ruled that heretics and the lapsed need not be re-baptised upon returning to the Christian community. Donatists again appealed to the emperor and, in 316, Constantine re-iterated the Church's position and gave a final decision favouring Caecilian. Yet the matter was still not settled, and by 350 Donatists outnumbered Nicene Christians (Catholics) across North Africa. It is accepted that the presence of the large number of bishoprics, basilicas and baptisteries across the region — as it was important for both factions to be represented. The Conference of Carthage in 411, held by Honorius, led to the suppression of Donatism, which was further proscribed in 412 when its clergy were exiled and their property seized. In 418, elaborate provisions were drawn up allowing Donatist bishops to be employed in the Catholic Church, thus uniting both communities.[20] The group had mostly disappeared by the middle of the fifth century. It is important to note that very little material and epigraphic evidence has been attributed to Donatists and most of what we know of the movement has been reported by Augustine and Optatus. Donatists were considered obsessed with martyrdom, purity, and saw themselves the only True and Pure Church.[21] The Vandal invasions, and subsequent reconquering of North Africa by Justinian, are also important events that require consideration.

Vandals arrived in North Africa from Spain in 429, across the Straits of Gibraltar. Under Geiseric, the group laid siege to Hippo in 430 and took Carthage in 439. This East Germanic tribe was Christian, but practised Arianism, a non-Nicene form of Christianity. This rejection of the Nicene creed (adopted in 325, at the First Council of Nicaea) caused tension between the new Arian rulers and the North African Nicene population. Nicene persecutions under Vandal rule are attested to as early as 429, but there was no ban on Nicene activity.[22] Bishops were exiled and in some areas, individual acts of violence against clergy

[20] Bonner 1986
[21] Tilley 1997, 1
[22] Leone 2007, 139

and laymen were recorded. Vandals recognized that the clergy and churches still had important standing in the community, consequently land seizures had more to do with the invaders comfortably embedding themselves in the area, rather than with an exercise of religious zeal.[23] Archaeological evidence and recent scholarship do not support a systematic destruction of property by the Vandals, or sustained Catholic persecutions, as previous historians accepted. Catholic rule was re-established in North Africa in 534 under Justinian, through successful campaigns waged by Belisarius against the Vandal kings. Archaeological evidence, at least in Carthage and Lepcis Magna, shows how Justinian's victory against the Vandals was marked by the construction of monumental churches and an investment in infrastructure, and defence structures such as forts.[24] The city of Demna remained the last Byzantine stronghold in North Africa, and Arabs who conquered the Cap Bon peninsula in 674 further attested to a well-urbanized and prosperous region.

Carthage, the capital of Africa Proconsularis, is touted as being more Roman than Rome, economically wealthy and culturally important.[25] Clerics, explorers and archaeologists who conducted research in the area during the nineteenth century under French colonial rule recorded data with various degrees of precision and set up museums to display their new discoveries. The lack of scientific rigour demonstrated in initial records is coupled with an historical, colonial bias that has, in certain instances, not been challenged. Further, these explorers had their own (sometimes political) agenda and ambitions to satisfy.[26] Declared a Unesco World heritage site in 1979, Carthage, along with eastern North Africa, saw the undertaking of several decades of archaeological research, restoration, protection and management using modern and more scientific methodologies. This research establishes a local, North African history built on local, North African evidence where more attention is paid to chronology and unravelling the evidence of Punic, pre-Roman and late-antique periods, for example. Because of further discoveries, the interest in rural, baptismal and

[23] Heather 2007, 140
[24] Procopius offered a glimpse of Justinian's undertakings in Carthage and Lepcis Magna. Leone 2007, 242
[25] Brown 1971; Salzman 2002
[26] Fenwick 2012

funerary landscapes has steadily increased and two generations later, research shows that new insight can be gained by the review of the initial, and often the only, findings of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moreover, historians now embrace a more realistic model of change and continuity in Late Antiquity in North Africa, where "the most fundamental continuity was diversity."[27] This model challenges whether there was indeed true rupture with the past and a decline and fall of the Roman Empire, at least in North Africa.[28]

[27] Grey 2011, 51
[28] Leone 2007

1: The State of Early Christian Baptistery Study

This chapter reviews scholarship carried out in the field of early Christian architecture and iconography, specifically applied to the problem of baptisteries, to verify whether previous conclusions are still valid. The survey exposes a lack of integrated approach across the discipline, which suggests the need to use a more holistic and flexible method to examine early Christian baptisteries and baptismal iconography. The use of case-studies allows us to examine monuments individually, in depth, and adjust questions to address the specific ambiguities or problems that the iconography and monuments display. Moreover, this approach facilities a broadening or narrowing of context. After explaining the ritual of baptism, clarifying the role of baptisteries, and discussing the emergence of baptism iconography, the study identifies the degree of success achieved through the use of typological, topographical and symbolic approaches to the problem of baptisteries.

1.1 Baptism

Baptism is the rite that catechumens or neophytes (new converts) undergo to become Christian. This initiation is carried out only once in a Christian's lifetime. In the early centuries of the Church, adult initiates stood in rivers or in fountains, basins or fonts large enough to accommodate immersion (partial or complete) or aspersion with blessed water. This physical cleansing is invested with a symbolic connotation and a spiritual purification: the pardon of sins by God and the establishment of a new covenant between Christian and God. This form of initiation ritual was the culmination of a period of careful study and fasting, during which adult initiates prepared to embrace a new way of life and receive the Spirit from God. Infant and child baptisms were not the norm during the early centuries of Christianity, as they are now, considering the preparation required.[29] There is no consensus amongst scholars about when child baptisms were first carried out; however, the size of baptism fonts indicates that the vast majority of baptisms were performed on adults. Everett

[29] In some instances, children and infants were allowed baptism, if an adult could speak for the child.

Ferguson argues that written sources, which suggested infant baptisms was carried out — possibly from the end of the second century — and archaeological data, seem to be at odds. The existence and layout of larger basins in no way rules out the ritual being performed on small children, as was required in emergency circumstance, for example.[30] As Ferguson pointed out, if baptism became more about water and the Trinitarian formula, and less about a profession of faith, infants or children became believers through undergoing the ritual of baptism itself and evidently not after a period of preparation.[31] In basic terms, the ritual itself modelled what is described in the Gospel narratives, but its liturgical and ceremonial development continued as Christianity evolved.

The narratives of Christ's baptism are treated as historical facts in the Gospels (Mat 3: 13–17, Mark 1: 9–11, Luke 3: 21–22, John 1: 32-34). Theologically, it was problematic for Jesus (the Messiah who was considered without sin) to submit to baptism by John the Baptist. These synoptic versions of the Gospels did not shy away from this debate, however, and in doing so supplied a link between Judaism and Christianity.[32] Further, the Gospel narratives provided confirmation that Jesus was the Son of God: during Jesus' baptism, the heavens opened and a voice, God's, was heard addressing him as His Beloved Son. The Spirit of God, embodied by a dove, was also present and descended onto Jesus.[33] Mat 3: 11-13 suggests that Jesus' baptism established this initiation as the entrance ritual into Christianity, whereas Luke's core message resides in the "dispensation of the Spirit to all Christian believers."[34] John's writings focus on the person of John the Baptist as witness to the Voice of God and to the Spirit descending upon Jesus. A distinction is also made in John's version between how John the Baptist baptised with water, whereas Jesus (and God) baptise through the Spirit.[35] Jesus' baptism marked the start of his ministry and supplied the theophany, or manifestation of God, that confirmed him as the Messiah and Son of God. The Gospel

[30] Ferguson 2009, 857
[31] Ferguson 2009, 857
[32] Jesus as Messiah was heralded by John the Baptist, thus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy. Hellholm 2011, 380
[33] Mat 3: 16, Mar 1: 10, Luke 3: 22, John 1: 32. Despite the absence of anointing and enthronement usually associated with this Roman religious act, Mark's account alludes to an inauguration. Hellholm 2011, 387
[34] Hellholm 2011, 389
[35] Yet the ritual of baptism itself still involves the use of blessed water.

narratives thus validated the foundation of baptism and further established the importance of the Trinity of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as fundamental participants in baptism. Those who wanted to follow Christ after hearing the apostles preach were encouraged to prepare for and submit to baptism, at which time they (the followers) received the unique gift of the Holy Spirit:

> Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.[36]

In the first century of Christianity, congregations had no means to, or interest in, developing "ecclesiastical architecture."[37] Christianity was not yet sanctioned by the state and its followers had few communal resources. Christians were almost exclusively limited to using private houses to accommodate worship and their main ritual of communion, or breaking of the bread, which was a rite attended only by initiates. There is no material evidence that specific architectural spaces were allocated for baptism in this early period. The Gospels, other written accounts and early Christian art represent baptism as a rite performed outside initially, using naturally flowing water such as streams and rivers. Christian communities were already better organised by the mid-second century. The emergence of a Church hierarchy, alongside more defined liturgy and theology, shaped attitudes around rituals and worship through the writings of the first Church fathers, for example. Baptism was relocated to private baths or fountains, settings that were built to provide water, but not exclusively for the purpose of baptisms.[38] As these sites were not exclusively used as baptisteries, it remains difficult to determine when this shift from a natural setting to a dedicated built environment occurred. Large Christian communities were by this time visible across the Empire. Christians owned domestic property which they used and modified to

[36] Acts 2: 37-38
[37] Krautheimer 1965, 2
[38] Krautheimer suggests that this happened as early at the beginning of the second century. Krautheimer 1965, 3

primarily accommodate meetings. From the third century, written sources no longer refer to baptism as occurring in natural settings, nor did they address the quality of water utilised for the ritual (running water versus standing water, for example).[39]

The use of water as an instrument of purification and cleansing was widespread in Classical Antiquity. Bath houses, both public and private, were common across the Mediterranean in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Early Christian literature records the use of private baths or *balneae,* alongside specifically Christian built environments to accommodate baptism.[40] The habit of bathing and the architectural structures built to accommodate it are more useful indicators than Christian symbolism, to explain certain characteristics of baptisteries.[41]

The culture of bathing was not the only tradition to shape baptisteries. In the first instance, Christians also understood baptism in terms of death and burial; the death of a previous life and the rebirth into a new community, a new way of living following Christ's example.[42] The association between baptism font and tomb are obvious: the physical "descent" and "ascent" one undertook to get into and out of the baptismal pool was not unlike descending into a tomb or catacomb and resurrecting.[43] Structural similarities have been noted early between imperial *mausolea*, martyr shrines and some freestanding baptisteries; building categories that generally employ a central plan. The placement of fonts in the middle of the floor provided a gallery or ambulatory space where participants and attendees gathered. Baptisteries and fonts were also compared to wombs because of the use of water and the nudity required for the ritual.[44] Funerary and baptismal spaces shared iconographic themes, but these different contexts demonstrate the polyvalence of Christian imagery at the time. A new triumphal pictorial vocabulary emerged where salvation was

[39] Jensen 2011, 134
[40] Brandt 2011, 1589
[41] Brandt 2011, 1602
[42] Luke 12:50
[43] Davies 1962, 14
[44] Jensen 2011, 38, 78

gained through baptism, in addition to death. Another aspect of Christian baptism is its place within the broader context of ritual initiations in Classical Antiquity.

More than any other, the Jewish tradition of proselyte baptism seems to offer a close shared background to the development of the Christian ritual. In Jewish purification practices, immersion was required as part of the rabbinic conversion rite. Like the baptism font, the *mikveh,* or Jewish immersion pool held water for immersion. The source of this water determined its quality and "living" or flowing water was best. The provision, transport and storage of the water for use in the *mikveh* was highly prescribed and rabbinical literature and the Torah set out specific requirements around the use of this water and associated rituals. The *mikveh* was crucial to the practice of Jewish religion: in lean times, congregations were told to prioritize building a *mikveh* over a synagogue. Evidence of these pools is found across what is now modern Israel and across the Jewish Diaspora (from the first century BCE). In the Jewish tradition, immersion was repeated as necessary in order to regain ritual purity, an action which differs significantly from Christianity, where orthodoxy requires one immersion (baptism) only. In addition to immersion, conversion to Judaism also required circumcision and a sacrifice.[45] Moreover, Jewish practice applied only to the family who wished to convert, and not to subsequent generations. The change in status of the Jewish convert rested more with the process itself than with the immersion and therefore bears little resemblance to baptism rituals.[46] During Christian baptism, the physical ablution simultaneously signalled a spiritual cleansing and it is this washing away of sins which sets baptism apart from other initiation rites, where the washing of the body is a purification which occurs in preparation of the initiation – it is not the initiation *per se.*

[45] Ferguson 2009, 78
[46] Ferguson 2009, 81

1.2 Baptistery Terminology

The term "baptistery" did not initially designate a building as Christian, but it did signify a particular kind of building which could be built close to a Christian church, and should be used for the celebration of Christian baptism.[47] The language used by early Christian written sources, such as the *Liber Pontificalis*, indicated that the structures were used for bathing but they did not assign a specific significance to the bath itself.[48] One exception was the new and uniquely Christian expression of "Photismos", "house of enlightenment", that emerged in eastern inscriptions during the sixth century.[49] This linguistic evidence indicates that the vocabulary used from the first century to discuss and describe baptisteries was already adequate.[50] The fact that these spaces lacked a distinctively Christian appellation in no way lessens the importance of the initiation rite conducted therein.

1.3 Baptisteries

Fonts, basins and baptisteries provide physical evidence that Christians built spaces specifically to celebrate baptism in their communities. The earliest surviving baptistery was found the *domus ecclesia* in Dura Europos, Syria. The house was built in 232-33 and modified in 246-256, to accommodate a meeting space and a baptistery [FIG. 1.1].[51] The initial private purpose of the rooms was modified to accommodate religious services and sacraments. The architectural development of a separate room in which to conduct the ritual indicated a concern with the practical aspects of the ritual, namely the need for water and cleansing facilities, the necessity to separate novices from initiates and concerns about modesty.[52] The Dura Europos baptistery demonstrates innovation in terms of its architecture, redesigned in the service of a community and its developing ritual needs. Despite its location and

[47] Brandt 2011, 1588
[48] Brandt 2011, 1589
[49] Brandt 2011, 1589
[50] Brandt 2011, 1589 mentions an anonymous pilgrim's *Itenerarium* that used of the word "*balneus*" in reference to a private bath in Caesarea that was venerated as the site of Cornelius' baptism.
[51] Gates 1984, 177-8
[52] Guy 2004, 221

uniqueness, it is not an outlier in terms of its iconography and layout.

Baptisteries emerge as a separate and identifiable type of Christian building across the Mediterranean during the fifth century, approximately. Monumental baptisteries existed contemporaneously with more modest rooms that accommodated a basin for the celebration of the rite.[53] The design, depth, position, layout and décor of fonts and basins varied greatly, although for practical reasons basins generally occupied the centre of a room. All baptisteries, whether they were large and self-contained or simple rooms, were built in proximity of, attached to or included within a basilica or church complex.

Olof Brandt argued that the classical form of baptisteries erected during the fifth century were late-antique Roman bath buildings. Infrastructure was already in place to provide running water to public baths and domestic and public *nymphaea*. According to him, this technology was available for use in baptisteries and consequently, important baptisteries in Rome and Milan were provided with running water, just as Roman fountains were.[54] Although Roman hydraulic technology allowed baptistery water to be plumbed in, smaller parish baptisteries rarely had such elaborate water systems. For these, it is thought that the water was provided from cisterns, transported into the basins and cared for, especially in areas where water was a precious commodity: the presence and use of cisterns is attested in North African basilicas, for example. The use of baths in which to conduct baptism may explain why there is a gap in the baptistery records during the fourth century — between the decorated baptisteries of Dura Europos and San Giovanni in Fonte, Naples. For Brandt, baptistery structures do not "come from" Roman baths because they form a discreet category of buildings that accommodated sacred bathing.[55] Notwithstanding the ritual aspects of baptism, the similar purpose of these spaces was reinforced by a lack of distinction in the terminology used to identify baptisteries. Brandt suggested that regional difference in baptism font shapes reflected the influence of local, contemporary *nymphaea*, or Roman

[53] Khatchatrian 1962
[54] Brandt 2011, 1590
[55] Brandt 2011, 1596; Ristow 1998, 21

fountains. He based these observations on similarities between font and basin shapes and décor from fountains, statues, marble, (pavement) mosaics and the presence of animal and vegetal imagery.[56] Brandt framed baptisteries within the context of baths built in Late Antiquity, *nymphaea* and fountains, where architecture revolved around structures built for the purpose of providing water for bathing and enjoyment, as opposed to relying on a symbolic and uniquely Christian perspective.

Monumental churches first appeared sporadically in urban areas around the Mediterranean in the fourth century, so the emergence of a defined baptism building type in the fifth century requires explanation. For Brandt, this delay raised the question of whether this discrete category of building was required by early Christians or whether the ritual was accommodated in other spaces. Brandt argued that that the main catalyst behind the erection of monumental baptisteries was "propaganda" through the use of public Christian architecture.[57] This explanation is plausible, but the lack of early monumental baptisteries can also be explained, in more pragmatic terms, by the lack of available resources and the lack of official recognition of Christianity as a state religion. Indeed, the first important turning point for Christian architecture, according to Richard Krautheimer, was the influx of resources through monumental building programmes and patronage brought about by Constantine's conversion, as well as the subsequent adoption of Christianity as an official Roman religion. This change in status also stimulated, on a smaller scale, the development of parish churches and basilicas — buildings associated with conversion, worship, marriage, death and burial — as well as pilgrimage and martyr shrines, especially in North Africa.[58] Both Krautheimer and Brandt emphasized the importance of patronage in the development of early ecclesiastical architecture. Christian patronage and investment in monumental architecture, not unlike propaganda, contributed to the dissemination of the Christian faith.

[56] Brandt 2011, 1593
[57] Brandt 2011, 1588
[58] For a discussion on emerging Christian building types, see Krautheimer 1965, 17

Armen Khatchatrian was first to compile a catalogue of early baptisteries and baptism fonts across the Mediterranean, thus establishing the main corpus of early Christian baptistery structures.[59] His survey, which is still regarded as the most comprehensive of its kind, comprised over 400 monuments and basins from the third to the seventh centuries. The floor plans and baptism font drawings it included were accompanied by short bibliographic references and highlighted the quantity of scholarship already conducted on individual sites and buildings. The survey also demonstrated a wide variety of baptistery and font configurations. Khatchatrian cites the main challenges he faced to compile this work, mainly because of the inconsistencies in past research and, in some cases, the paucity of detail or lack of rigor with which the archaeological data were initially recorded.[60] The conservation of buildings and their identification as baptisteries or baptism-related monuments also posed problems. The proximity of a room to a baptistery is no guarantee that the room was utilised during the baptism ritual.

Khatchatrian signalled the more important issue facing scholarship in the field of early Christian architecture, namely the lack of reliable chronological data. This was specifically identified in his work where he insisted that chronological distinctions between baptisteries from the third and seventh centuries were insufficient to serve as basis for a further, more detailed classification. Instead he used typology and geography as means of classifying the data, by loosely grouping plans and drawings into five geographic zones, and then presenting the monuments in the same order within each geographic area:

- simple rooms or baptisteries located underground;
- baptisteries possibly redesigned from non-Christian sites;
- annexes and stand-alone baptisteries usually consisting of central plan building topped by a dome, where the font was circled by a gallery;
- more exceptional or complex buildings.[61]

The contentious issue of chronology seems to be exacerbated slightly by the way

[59] Khatchatrian 1962
[60] Khatchatrian 1962, XI
[61] Khatchatrian 1962, XIII

Khatchatrian presented the buildings, but a logical way of organizing the abundance of information was still required.

As a result of Khatchatrian's work, scholars could for the first time appreciate baptistery distribution patterns and compare building layouts or font shapes across geographic boundaries. Despite the frequent and fragmentary nature of the physical evidence available, and the lack of uniform scale in the drawings and plans, the organization of this large body of evidence allowed for rudimentary cross-referencing of information. Since the compilation of this catalogue, additional monuments have been identified as early Christian baptisteries. In many cases, the fonts are all that remain. This is because basins were habitually built into the floors and pavements of the baptistery and consequently, were more prone to be preserved. Moreover, the materials they were made of, like mosaics, were less likely to be reused in later buildings.

A theologian and contemporary of Khatchatrian, J. G. Davies attempted to explain the architectural setting of baptism through baptism liturgy. Using this symbolic approach, he considered that "any building in the ancient world was meant to convey a meaning which transcends the visual pattern of the structure."[62] At a stretch, this observation may be valid after the fact, but it is the immediacy of the surroundings and of the space that a building defines that provide the backdrop for an individual's experience. Further, it can be argued that few participants would have grasped a building's transcendence or symbolism, as they did not experience the structure as a whole. In other words, although patrons or architects may have defined an overarching concept for the space, this vision did not necessarily translate to the way that people experienced the space. These baptisteries were seen and experienced quite differently by contemporaries who did not have the benefit of global hindsight and the breadth of knowledge provided by Khatchatrian's catalogue. The abundance of information may have led scholars, unwittingly, to use presentism in their analysis, setting aside contemporary context.

[62] Davies 1962, 16

Davies relied heavily on theology and liturgy to explain baptistery structures, font layouts, decorations and inscriptions. He argued that an increase in complexity of baptism practice, from the third century onward, was reflected in the material evidence. A key problem with this explanation is that there is little, if any, specific contemporary information about the ritual and how it was performed, let alone proof of the degree of its complexity applicable to a particular setting. In practical terms, the resources available to Christian communities, for example, impacted on what art these communities produced. Although Davies conceded that the ritual was not uniformly carried out at the time, the material evidence does not support his decisive conclusion that a larger baptistery may simply have accommodated a larger number or participants, without necessarily signalling an increased complexity in the ritual. Furthermore, the desire to find a unique or overarching liturgical formula that simultaneously explains the layout of buildings, facilities (fonts), décor and inscriptions fails because the functions of these space differs. In addition, each aspect of the environment requires a discipline-specific approach. In other words, liturgy cannot be used as a starting point to explain décor, let alone architecture and inscriptions. Moreover, one could argue that these material structures and items were not produced in response to a liturgical need. Of course, the liturgical aspects of baptism were important, yet we have few details surrounding the ceremonies carried out in specific spaces. Despite providing an outline of research that promised careful consideration of material evidence, Davies only reiterated the importance of the Christian initiation in the first centuries of Christianity. He was ultimately unable to make a convincing argument that the design of baptisteries demonstrated, in practical terms, a fidelity to New Testament teachings.[63]

A more pragmatic approach is to consider the actions of those who planned and built baptisteries to accommodate the ritual and its audience of participants. Although it is near impossible to tease out the exact contribution of patron, architect and artisan involved in the execution of these buildings and décor, the input of these persons and practical considerations are a better way to explain how these spaces came to be. Whether the patron had a say in what exactly the architect designed, or whether the person who paid the

[63] Davies 1962, 41

commission chose the imagery that decorated these early spaces remains difficult to substantiate.

1.4 Emergence of Baptistery Iconography

Material evidence shows that Christians decorated baptism space as early as the third century. The baptistery at Dura Europos displays this ornamentation with frescoes depicting a starry sky painted on its vaulted ceiling [FIG. 1.2]. In addition, scenes of Jesus performing miracles, such as healing the paralytic, were painted on the walls. As baptisteries and baptism spaces developed, their décor was embellished with frescoes, mosaics and sculptural elements that evolved toward expressing a specific pictorial programme. This iconography supported the baptism ritual and added to the experience of neophytes and Christians.

According to Lucien De Bruyne, the models for this developing baptistery iconography were to be found in Christian cemetery art. These early Christian funeral images provided the appropriate motifs to illustrate at least the two earliest surviving decorated baptisteries that "bookended" the gap in evidence between the third and fifth centuries, namely the baptisteries in Dura Europos and in San Giovanni in Fonte.[64] For De Bruyne, the use of similar images (the Good Shepherd, starry sky, and illustration of New Testament miracles) in both baptisteries is evidence of the promotion of a specific theology, through the recurrence of pastoral and salvific themes, which were repeatedly referred to in liturgical and theological discussions on baptism, presumably at the time these baptisteries were built.[65] When De Bruyne analysed the presence of the Good Shepherd in Christian baptisteries, he omitted other psychopomp beings (such as Orpheus) that could have informed his study. Similarly, De Bruyne ignored the décor of Santa Costanza, in Rome (fourth century), as he thought it was unlikely to have been inspired by baptismal liturgy.[66] De Bruyne's highly selective method resulted in an unproductive and circular discussion. Furthermore, he did not explain the process by which baptismal liturgy or theology, or a particular form or type

[64] De Bruyne 1957, 342
[65] De Bruyne 1957, 345
[66] De Bruyne 1957, 346

of baptismal ritual, led to baptismal art and iconography. He did not recognize that liturgy and art intrinsically fulfil different needs and exercise different functions within ecclesiastical discourse. Nor did he understand the importance of baptismal art, its impact on the ritual space and how it conveyed a spiritual, transformative and ultimately triumphal message. De Bruyne was not able to resolve satisfactorily the impossible gap between liturgy and art.

In addition to the iconography that developed to decorate baptisteries, it is important to acknowledge the early representations of the baptism ritual itself, which adorned catacombs, sarcophagi and small portable objects of ivory and glass not associated with a baptismal context [FIG. 1.3]. These depictions of the ritual raise a question about the identity of the neophyte depicted. Although this imagery uses the Gospels' accounts of Jesus' baptism as inspiration, it is unclear whether Jesus was the neophyte in these examples.[67] The problem lies in the representation of the neophyte as a smaller, naked childlike figure, in contrast to a larger clothed baptizer [FIG. 1.4, 1.5]. There is no contemporary evidence of a nude childlike depiction of Jesus, as he is always portrayed clothed and as an adult. Nor are there any inscriptions that identify the participants in these images of the ritual. Yet there is an artistic tradition that supports this manner of portraying an initiate as a smaller figure. It is thought that the smaller stature of the neophyte in these baptism depictions conveyed the idea of rebirth and consequently that the initiate (not Jesus) was depicted as a child, as though regenerated.[68] This explanation also clarifies why the smaller figures cannot be interpreted as children, as there were few child baptisms performed at the time.[69] These are pertinent theological observations. Robin Jensen remarked that these first portrayals of baptism offered a link to viewers that made the historical event of Jesus' baptism accessible, implying that these may have represented the baptism of Jesus. These images allowed baptized Christians to share in Christ's death and resurrection. Baptism iconography evolved and eventually became closer to the biblical narrative, culminating in representations of the baptism of an adult Christ.[70] Jensen attributed this development either to the later use of

[67] Ferguson 2009, 123
[68] Jensen 2011, 28
[69] Ferguson 2009, 124
[70] Jensen 2011, 126

illuminated Bibles or to the development of monumental narrative programmes.[71] Evidence of more triumphal aspects of baptistery imagery appeared in the late fourth century on a grand scale, in the still extant dome of the Neonian and Arian baptisteries in Ravenna. The dome was a simple and elegant solution to cover a central-plan building. This structure developed into an important component not only of baptistery architecture, but also as a support for baptism iconography. The baptism of Christ, a founding motif of Christianity, occupied this central and overarching position of the dome, establishing a tradition of which few examples remain.[72]

In her analysis of the symbolism and settings of early Christian baptism, Jensen questions material evidence as a starting point for her discussion. This approach reverses symbolic explanations that sought immediate interpretations of imagery from textual evidence. She recognizes that the analysis of material and documentary evidence complement, but do not complete, each other, and each source expands the understanding of how "early believers practiced and understood their faith."[73] Images were evocative to the viewer, but the iconography was unable to capture every detail of what was described or written about in texts and so it maintains a multiplicity of meaning. Epigraphical evidence, such as biblical text and liturgy, provided broad ritual themes and explained the presence of witnesses and the dove in baptism depictions, for example. In turn, the images needed to offer an instantaneously recognizable view of contemporary practices — only if these were the subject of the illustrations, of course. In short, Jensen's work confirms the diverging goals of documentary evidence and iconography, but explains how both are important to the study of early Christian baptism art. Jensen is adept at analysing wider themes; however, her generalist approach leads to conclusions that accept all options. Her publications are useful as reference material.

[71] Jensen 2011, 126
[72] Ristow 1998, 93-94
[73] Jensen 2011, 1

1.5 Approaches

The different manners in which to analyse the problem of baptisteries are best summarized as typological, topographical or symbolic methods. The typological approach identifies models for the new building types, rather than acknowledge and define their purpose. To some extent, authors such as Khatchatrian, Ristow and Jensen utilise this approach, but as Brandt observed with regard to baptistery architecture: "The statement…is in some way the answer to a non-existing question. The Christian baptistery does not "come" from the baths, because it is one of them."[74] Furthermore, Khatchatrian's work also invalidated one aspect of this method, insofar as he demonstrates that a group of buildings does not evolve from simpler to more complex forms in an almost Darwinian way. The data in his catalogue show how baptistery types coexisted within the same region, and that simple rooms were sometimes found at a very late date, alongside more elaborate baptisteries and fonts. Consequently, the complexity (or simplicity) of baptism-related structures remains an unreliable indicator of chronology. Nor can it speak to the complexity (or simplicity) of the rituals performed therein because there is no specific correlation between material and written evidence, such as ceremony and liturgy.

The topographical approach sought to identify and define the rules that established the position of baptisteries in relation to church or pilgrimage complexes, or urban areas. This approach has come to an end without results and it seems unlikely to be reprised in the future for this line of enquiry. The sheer variety of baptisteries, their placement in relation to basilicas and other sanctuary buildings, as well as their location in urban and rural settings, demonstrate that no one set of rules apply. If anything, the data indicate how flexible these spaces were to accommodate the needs of the communities who used them. In a similar fashion, attempting to identify a set of rules to explain baptism iconography fails.

The symbolic approach, used by Davies and De Bruyne, was meant to prove the existence of a symbolic message behind the structure of baptisteries. The aforementioned

[74] Ristow 1988, 21; Brandt 2011, 1596; Jensen 2011, 234 ff.

discussion demonstrates that this approach failed to produce new information, mainly because "texts are texts and structures are structures (…) a symbolic reading could be done *a posteriori* or talk about buildings which did not exist".[75] This last approach has had a long history and is still used, despite the fact that it habitually relies on very little factual evidence, and it is unable to establish a specific link between text and structure because each articulated messages differently. Liturgy may be a useful tool after the fact to explain structure, but it cannot be considered as a starting point for artistic discussion.[76] No scholar to date has been able to explain the mechanism by which text becomes image, because it does not exit. Although both baptistery structure and décor must necessarily befit the ritual, there is no one formula that is behind the buildings' construction and decoration. Although epigraphic evidence may have provided pictorial themes and shaped early Christian thought, texts did not govern the layout of baptismal space or iconography.

> Texts and structures are different universes and obey different mental structures. It is difficult to use one to explain the other. Neither does a purely ritual approach explain why the structures of the baptisteries so often are identical to the forms of other buildings with completely different functions.[77]

More recent work carried out by Brandt and Ristow demonstrates how the review of existing material evidence can provide new information and raise new questions about baptisteries.[78] This thorough approach studies monuments *in situ* and teases out further information through careful observation, measurements and the use of new technologies. Ultimately, despite its focus on the buildings, this method places the viewer or user of the space at the centre of the analysis. Although Brandt's research focused mainly on architecture and structure, his method can also apply to iconography, insofar as new conclusions can be drawn by conducting further investigations and posing different questions about monuments already recorded and studied. Brandt's stratigraphic analysis of the walls of extant buildings,

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[75] Despite citing a promising Syriac text, no one including Dölger has been able to observe the manifestation of symbolic measurements mentioned in any known building. Brandt 2011, 1600
[76] Jensen 2005, 243
[77] Brandt 2011, 1603
[78] Ristow 1998; Brandt 2014

a method previously reserved for the analysis of standing medieval structures, has provided new information about the use of these edifices.[79] This procedure, and the new technology it involves, were used to re-analyse the well-documented Lateran and Albenga baptisteries. Similarly, Ristow reached new conclusions about baptism ceremony through a meticulous re-examination of existing evidence. In addition to new technology, new excavations at existing sites such as those he carried on the island of Kos, in Greece, have provided renewed insight into the ritual use of these baptisteries.

These most incisive developments in the study of baptisteries recognize the importance of including people when studying structure and iconography. A more holistic method acknowledges not only those who built and designed these buildings and décors but, perhaps more importantly, focuses on those who participated in the rituals that took place in these baptismal spaces. Such considerations cover both contexts of production and reception around a monument. Scholars such as Krautheimer, Ristow and Brandt took into account communities and patrons as agents of change. A definite shift occurred in early Christian scholarship when Krautheimer suggested that the social, historical and religious aspects of architecture could no longer be ignored in subsequent scholarship. Although Krautheimer did not discuss baptisteries in detail, his observations are useful for studying them. His comprehensive discussion about early Christian and Byzantine architecture broadened comparanda to include architecture outside Christianity. By further understanding early Christian architecture as the last phase of Roman architecture, he placed it in its social, historical and religious context. He also suggested that during the Constantinian period, ideological frameworks began to influence the development of practical architectural features in churches. For example, he observed how architecture supported the developing Church hierarchy by segregating groups according to their role and status in the early Christian community.[80] Krautheimer identified how the growth of congregations, and the evolving roles of Christians within the wider community, helped

[79] Brandt 2011
[80] Krautheimer 1965, 18

determine the type of space required and how it was used.[81] Milestones, such as the conversion of Constantine and the building programmes initiated by Justinian, impacted Christian architecture. The variety of baptistery buildings matched local customs and needs: to some extent, each Christian congregation shaped the buildings it built and used.

Ristow drew attention to the performance of ceremony as a key element of baptistery analysis. He encountered the same chronological and documentary problems as Khatchatrian, yet there is novelty in the information Ristow presented: after a review the archaeology of Kos baptisteries, for example, he studied how the wear pattern of the flagstones bore witness to the buildings' usage.[82] Participants' utilisation of space was recorded in the fabric of the building and by paying attention to such minute details as measuring the precise baptism font depth (to determine whether aspersion or immersion was used at a particular site, for example), Ristow proved that one can gain new insight from existing data. It is difficult to reconcile Ristow's view that performance of the ritual is more meaningful than the study of architectural remains, with his use of the material evidence as a starting point for his discussion, but his conclusions are a step closer to appreciating how the community occupied the space.[83] The expansive material Ristow considered is so vast that his research has been critiqued for its unequal treatment of the information.[84] Yet, this approach still needs to be balanced out with broader historical and social contexts. Ristow and Brandt's careful methods will bear fruit in only a small number of cases, where the archaeology itself can be studied again or where records, notes and photos documenting sites are exceptional.

The survey of previous scholarship highlights a lack of a synthetic approach to early baptisteries, even in cases where authors may stipulate otherwise. Scholars have either focussed on architecture or iconography, with varying degrees of success. This split is no doubt the result of specialist discipline but it may also indicate authorial bias. The lack of one

[81] Krautheimer 1965, 3
[82] Ristow 1998, 85
[83] Ristow 1998, 97
[84] Snively 1999

effective, synthetic methodology thus far suggests that monuments might instead benefit from a more specific, case-by-case approach where multiple disciplines are utilised and all available evidence is questioned carefully, in detail. Advances in technology and a reframing of historical events, for example, have already led to interesting results. Brandt suggests that future research should approach baptism structures not so much as works of art, but rather as utilitarian buildings that served a specific ritual purpose.

The analysis of various approaches suggests that a holistic, case-study approach is best to use when studying early Christian baptisteries. This method conducts a thorough analysis of the current data on the one hand, whilst re-contextualizing the monument within its contemporary sociological, religious, art historical and historical parameters on the other. The monument itself becomes a starting point for the discussion. Modern scholarship also indicates an interest in how the art or space was used and viewed by the users of this space. Moreover, this approach considers people and their involvement in producing and understanding early Christian structures and décor. Of course, this method will not be applicable to all baptisteries or baptism fonts; in some cases, the information gathered about a structure may not be sufficient or sufficiently precise to allow further conclusions about the monument. Although rigorous, a more comprehensive method is also very flexible and thus it risks appearing unstructured. Still recreating a monument's contemporary context can give a surprisingly rich return, as demonstrated by authors such as John Clarke.[85]

Summary

The model for Christian baptism can be found in the Gospels, which record the baptism of Christ as historical fact. This initiation rite was performed on adult neophytes and consisted of immersion or aspersion with blessed water. At first performed in a natural setting such as a river, this ritual eventually occupied an assigned space within a religious complex or basilica. In order to celebrate these rituals closer to the communities, fonts and baptisteries were built in and around local basilicas to hold water and support the rite.

[85] Clarke 2003

Khatchatrian compiled a first catalogue of baptisteries and fonts in 1962. His data allowed researchers an overview of baptismal structures that was unprecedented. In addition to plans, the survey also collated all known bibliographic information relating to each artefact. Few of the monuments recorded by Khatchatrian have benefitted from more modern scrutiny, such as that undertaken by Ristow, for instance, in 1998. Evidence indicates that monumental baptisteries were first built around the Mediterranean from the fifth century. Before then, there is evidence of baptism carried out in a domestic, but purpose-built, baptistery in Dura Europos in the third century. Brandt explains that this gap in monumental evidence exists because during the fourth century, baptisms were carried out in Roman bathing structures, which enjoyed an expanded building programme at the time. Brandt also suggests that monumental "propaganda" was behind baptisteries. This is a reasonable theory, yet Krautheimer pointed out how, during its first centuries, Christianity suffered a lack of resources and official recognition. Both arguments are compelling and not mutually exclusive.

We know little about contemporary liturgy or ceremony, yet many approaches rely heavily on such elements of ecclesiastical discourse to explain baptistery architectural and structural features. A better understanding of how ceremony unfolded within baptismal spaces has replaced these interpretations, using the material evidence as a starting point. Not only is the progress of the ceremony important, but also the iconography that supported the ritual "as so often in ancient architecture, the meaning of the action performed in a building was not expressed or illustrated by the shape of the structure but rather by the decoration."[86]

1.6 Conclusion

Baptistery iconography is indebted to early Christian funeral art, but the imagery quickly adapted to a new context where the positive, spiritual and triumphal aspects of the baptism ritual replaced themes of salvation. Illustrating the sacrament of baptism became appropriate for a baptismal context toward the fifth century, at which time it culminated in

[86] Brand 2011, 1594

the representations of Jesus' baptism, as seen in the Orthodox and Arian baptistery domes. People were not only involved in the ceremonies that took place in churches, they also participated in their construction, the very inception of the building, in its planning stages: in its intent, in its design and in its execution. Despite the difficulty in identifying the principal persons involved, patronage also played a crucial role in building and decorating baptisteries. Here I rely here somewhat on Brandt's argument that there was an element of propaganda, conscious or not, which informed the process, especially in terms of iconography. Deliberate decisions were carried out about the selection of imagery, the phrasing of inscriptions and even, one could argue, in the space's redesign over time. In this case, the community or local clergy perhaps took on the roles of patrons themselves and covered the cost of modifying the space to meet their changing needs. The flexibility of Christian spaces in general, but of baptisteries in particular, is important to acknowledge and is clearly demonstrated in the monuments that remain, yet these changes are difficult to interpret. The approaches used by Ristow and Brandt have teased out new results and generated new questions from the careful observation of these changes, which is what research must work toward as technology and methods evolve, or new monuments are discovered. In most cases, a lack of walls further limits our ability to understand the remodelling of such buildings that happened long ago, so the suggestion of 3-D or CAD modelling is of particular interest, even if it might only be applied to a small corpus of monuments. A lack of success in generating new discussion through previous approaches reinforces the need to consider each monument on a case-by-case basis to allow an in-depth analysis and study of each artefact's data. In doing so, it remains important to keep in mind a congregation's individuality, as well as the broader historical, socio-economical, and political contexts for analysing baptisteries in North Africa.[87]

The knowledge gained in this chapter's scholarship survey suggests that applying a modern, holistic approach to an individual monument is the best way to gain new information from this reappraisal. This is best achieved through use of the case-study model. In the next Chapter, I have chosen to analyse the iconography of the Demna baptism font,

[87] Jensen 2005, 143

which is located in the Felix basilica in Demna, Tunisia. The font's mosaic presents an intriguing graphic arrangement, and a pictorial programme that has yet to be explained in its totality. The discussion of Christian visual comparanda here is most useful because baptism is a ritualised context. This observation does not preclude the introduction of other comparanda, however. I will analyse the more symbolic mosaic images from the baptism font's first layer and replace them, and the font, within the contemporary setting of extant baptistery iconography located the domes of the Neonian and Arian baptisteries of Ravenna. This comparison forms the basis of a new interpretation of the Demna font mosaic as an inverted dome.

2: The Demna Font Iconographic Programme

Demna is a coastal town in modern Tunisia located in what was formerly the Roman province of Africa Proconsularis. The Romans occupied the town during the Punic wars because of its strategic location on the Cap Bon peninsula, but razed it to the ground after the fall of Carthage in 145 BCE. In 45 BCE, under Julius Caesar, the town was re-founded as Clupea and given colonial status. It subsequently enjoyed prosperity throughout the Roman period, as attested by its substantial infrastructure.[88] The province's ecclesiastical organisation was loosely based on its civil geography. Recent studies on the distribution of Christianity across the Cap Bon region identify a surprising abundance of Christian churches in rural areas.[89] The precise name of the area where the basilica is located is not known, but it lies seven kilometres due north of the modern city of Demna, on the coast in the Cap Bon region, and will be referred to here as Demna. The basilica's name is also unknown, but for the purposes of this discussion, the building will be referred to as the Felix basilica.

The Felix basilica plan consisted of a rectangular narthex and an axial three-bay entrance into a three-aisled nave [FIG. 2.1]. As we shall see in chapter 4, this layout was not unique for North Africa and the location of a baptistery close to the main apse is also commonplace for the region.[90] Reinforced foundations indicated the presence of either a tower or a staircase in the north-eastern-most corner of the building. Down the length of the nave were two rows of six rectangular pillars, with an apse at the southwestern end. According to records, the walls of this apse were still visible to three meters high in 1955.[91] Access to the apse from the nave was by way of steps built into a platform. Two marble bases on either side of these steps suggest the presence of columns supporting an arched entrance to the apse. There was no transept, but the side chapels, although not symmetrical, are positioned in such a way to suggest one. The southwest chapel communicated with the

[88] Cintas 1958, 157. A more recent article confirms the evidence of uninterrupted wealth in the Cap Bon's rural areas; Ghalia 2005
[89] Ghalia 2005, 67
[90] Khatchatrian 1962, 27-36
[91] Courtois 1955, 98

baptistery, which was defined by substantial square pilasters. The baptistery also communicated with the main apse. The floor of the basilica contained tombs marked by colourful, decorative funerary mosaics. Intricate pavement mosaics also decorated the baptistery floor and its font. The mosaics covering the baptistery floor and font were exceptionally preserved and relocated to the Bardo museum, where the structure of the baptistery was recreated [FIG. 2.2].

2.1 Baptistery And Font Images

The baptistery is a square kiosk that was located at the southwestern corner of the basilica, defined by large pilaster of sandstone and a mosaic-covered floor and baptism font. The kiosk's configuration, abutting the basilica, suggests the presence of a vaulted ceiling. The pilasters were notched out to allow curtains to be hung, though no evidence of this arrangement survived, making the need for a temporary canopy redundant.[92] The sunken quadrilobate baptism font sits within a circular outline defined by a raised lip, in the middle of the baptistery floor. The basin has no plumbing or drainage, nor does it have proper steps; however, the lobed and stepped shape does assist with access to the water.[93] The basin has no angular features, the bevels and edges are all rounded and decorated with mosaic across the baptistery floor, the lip and within the font [FIG. 2.3].

A decorative twist borders the square mosaic floor of the baptistery. Made up of cream, ochre, green and rust-coloured *tesserae*, its shading gives a three-dimensional effect to the pattern. Vines emerge from water-filled craters, framing the basin from the four corners of the room. Birds, leaves, tendrils and grapes are also represented on the baptistery floor, drawing the eye into a busy pictorial field and toward the font. The resulting impression maintains a certain symmetrical arrangement, despite an elaborate pictorial field. The main inscription is on the lip of the basin, along with rosettes and indications of temporary poles to hold up a canopy [FIG. 2.4]. Even if the use of a canopy, or *ciborium*, over baptism fonts

[92] Jensen suggested that curtains were used to ensure privacy and keep the water in the font clean. Jensen 2011, 231

[93] On polylobed fonts in North Africa, see Duval 1980

is well attested in North Africa, there is no evidence that a temporary cover was required or used over the baptism font in the Felix basilica. However, the relocation of the mosaic may have removed evidence of this usage. The symbols depicted in the mosaic were familiar to the viewer and patron, and the inscriptions possibly support the ritual's proceedings and directionality. The vertical surfaces of the font and the thick black borders in the mosaic help organise what is an otherwise busy composition into registers, drawing the eye across the images as the viewer moves around the basin.

The mosaic in the uppermost level of the basin is laid on its vertical walls. Black lines frame the register as a whole. Black lines also form coffers around the central image of each lobe: a cross depicted under an articulated dome flanked by flowers and birds [FIG. 2.4], a dove with a cross on its back flanked by flowers and staurogram symbols (monogrammatic crosses) [FIG. 2.5], a type of box [FIG. 2.6] and an overflowing vase [FIG. 2.7]. Each projection is decorated with lit tapers [FIG. 2.5]. A reddish line of *tesserae* appears under this first register, still on the vertical surface, further separating the layer from images underneath. A black line with denticles decorates the horizontal projection below. This line simulates water, although there is nothing to indicate the depth of water that would have been used for baptism. Fish, other sea creatures and trees are located underneath these stylised waves. The second level or ring is divided into four "steps", each with a decorated horizontal and vertical surface. The vertical surfaces are decorated with monogrammatic crosses and apocalyptic letters carried on the back of dolphins, whilst various fish and sea creatures occupy the horizontal parts of the mosaic [FIG. 2.5]. Fruit trees are depicted on the projecting (vertical) surfaces between each alcove, below the candles. A decorative border of alternating lotus blossoms represented vertically on a dark background separate the second layer from the bottom of the basin. Such a decorative border appears as a regular feature in many of the basilica's funerary mosaics. Finally, at the bottom of the font there is a staurogram, aligned to be read with the threshold inscription, executed in red *tesserae* on a cream background. It is accompanied by the apocalyptic letters α and ω [FIG. 2.3 - 2.4].

Most of the images are easy to identify. The craters, vines and birds on the baptistery floor are common decorative devices on mosaic pavements and recall inhabited scrolls.[94] Water, an essential element of baptism, is represented by the full craters on the baptistery floor as well as the black line with denticles marking transition within the font, the additional black wavy lines found throughout the basin's décor, and the tipped vase [FIG 2.7]. The depictions of fish and sea creatures give the illusion of water teeming with life during the ritual, setting the illusion of "living" water. The neophyte descends into the basin to be blessed and symbolically becomes a fish among fish, a common symbol in early Christian art and theology.[95] Lit tapers are commonly associated with funereal contexts, but they are not limited to this context or to the North African region.[96] Here they surround the neophyte and reinforce the immediacy of the ritual and also symbolise the light transmitted and spread through the newly acquired faith. Positioned under these four candles, four different fruit-bearing trees further emphasize the vertical aspect of these projecting parts of the font. Such trees are often depicted in North African domestic mosaics but their use in a ritual setting is common. These trees also represent the four seasons and, by extension, the eternal cycle of life. Their location in this font is pertinent as they are rooted in the eternal, living water and bear fruit, another metaphor that can be applied to new Christians. They also evoke an Eden-like or paradisiacal garden, alongside the birds and other creatures represented on the mosaic. The overall organisation of the vegetal and animal images pointed to something spiritual and paradisiacal. There is no need for figurative representations in this pictorial programme as the focus is on the ritual's participants, some of whom are immersed, quite literally, in an artistic context that supports the baptism ritual in pragmatic, artistic and symbolic terms. At the time of baptism, each neophyte became the central figure of this group of images. This intimate and functional relationship between participants and art is exceptional here because of the proximity and interaction between viewer and art. The baptiser, along with witnesses to the ritual also take the place of important figures.

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[94] Dauphin 1987, 183-212

[95] Matthew 4:19 "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men". See also Jensen 2011. For examples of signet rings bearing fish and anchors, see Chapter Four in Spier 2007

[96] For more on mosaic tomb markers in Tabarka: Rushforth 1915, 149-164 and Cabrol 1907, 121-126

The Problematic Image of the Bee

One of the most disputed mosaic images was identified initially as a bee by Christian Courtois, in 1955.[97] This image was perplexing and unique in early Christian art because of its context and location [FIG. 2.8]. The creature is depicted with antennae that extend slightly below the horizontal step where it lies. The image is surrounded by wavy lines and is located under the mosaic's "waterline" (the black line with denticles). The creature has a round head with well-defined beady eyes and its single set of round-tipped wings is close to its pointy body. At first glance, this initial identification as a bee is compelling but peculiar. Scholars suggested a liturgical and ceremonial link between the images of the bee, the vase and the lit tapers to explain its presence.[98] Bees produce honey and wax, both of which are represented — the argument is made with difficulty — in the mosaic images by the lit tapers and the vase, that was linked to a part of the ritual when new Christians were offered a drink of milk and honey from a cup after they emerge from the baptismal waters.[99] The presence of the bee in the basin was further explained by drawing a parallel to its presence in prayers and blessings associated, tangentially, with the ritual of baptism itself. This liturgy, not directly part of the baptism ritual *per se*, consisted of blessing the paschal candles during the Easter vigil, a liturgical genre referred to as the "laus cerei" or "blessing of the candles."[100] This reference to Easter is significant, as it was considered an appropriate time for baptism.[101] The liturgy and the "Exsultet", or Easter proclamation, are presented as crucial components of the argument supporting the bee identification, because they refer to the bee and its various attributes in relation to Christian baptism.

In 1984, Février set aside any textual interpretations of the bee image in the Demna font mosaic and considered piscine visual comparanda instead. By suggesting images of cuttlefish found in Roman mosaic and in the Cuicul baptistery in Algeria, he decisively laid

[97] Courtois 1955, 119
[98] Poinssot, 1959
[99] Courtois 1955, 119; Poinssot 1959, 154
[100] Poinssot 1959, 154
[101] Ferguson, 474

the argument to rest [FIG. 2.9 and 2.10].[102] It is clear from his demonstration that the image in the Demna baptistery mosaic has much more in common with these examples. This comparanda comprised monuments from both domestic and ritual contexts. As Février points out, "(…) Le décor marin de Kélibia (…) dérive directement du décor des bassins de la maison. Les poissons ne font-ils pas partie intégrante du jardin vers lequel la maison se replie ou s'ouvre?"[103] This analysis takes into account the rich history of mosaic depictions of fish and other sea life during the Roman and late-antiquite periods. The author also convincingly explained the challenges of making a soft-bodied creature, such as a cuttlefish, recognizable to the viewer.

In 1992, Palazzo still claimed that the bee was an important symbol of the Demna font, a model for new Christians to emulate.[104] Notwithstanding Février's identification, Palazzo's premise was contingent upon a minimum of religious uniformity at a time when established ritual homogeneity and tradition were not necessarily fixed.[105] Further, evidence of consistent usage of these texts by early Christian communities at the time is tenuous and at best anecdotal. The position of the image within the font precludes its identification as a bee because of its location below the mosaic's waterline and its piscine context. More importantly, liturgical texts and images "are different universes and obey different mental structures."[106] The bee is, in fact, a cuttlefish.

Turning now to the uppermost register in the Demna font, the depictions located above the waterline were constantly visible and remained unchanged to any attendant or witness to the ritual, and once the neophyte was standing in the font, they were closest to him or her. These images can be read as contributing to the neophyte's ritual on both a

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[102] Février 1984. Although the author identified the image (numbered here as 2-12) as coming from the Caricin Grad baptistery in Serbia (Figure 7 in Février's article), further research has shown this is a Roman piscine mosaic from the Bardo collection in Tunisia.
[103] Février 1984,289
[104] Palazzo 1992, 102-120
[105] Palazzo 1992, 107-8
[106] Brandt 2001, 1603

practical and symbolic level. Moreover, the identification of these symbols represents a first step in reading the monument as a dome.

2.2 The Symbolism Of the Top Register

This section introduces new early Christian comparanda to the discussion and demonstrates how the Demna font iconography, represented on the top layer of the mosaic, displays a cohesive programme pertinent to the baptismal context. The images are discussed in no particular order.

The Articulated Dome

An articulated dome supported by black columns shelters a red cross between heraldically paired birds and flowers [FIG. 2.4]. The image is located in the alcove opposite "the box" and was initially thought to depict the baptistery itself.[107] This legitimate identification provided a realistic interpretation. However, this representation is a common pictorial device used to depict the sacred presence of a God.[108] Examples are abundant on early Christian sarcophagi, where they became associated with the triumphal theme of resurrection [FIG. 2.11]. This image of a cross under an articulated dome began to appear during the latter part of the fourth century, when Passion scenes and motifs such as wreathed crosses appeared on sarcophagi. The cross was no longer only considered a symbol of salvation, but also a symbol of triumph. This shift in imagery is thought to have reflected a shift in wealth, status and of Christians' own perception of their own religion at this time.[109] The fourth century was marked by the increase in use of crosses to represent Christ.[110] To a viewer in the Demna font, the multivalent image of a cross under an articulated dome represented Christ, and the triumphal aspects of his resurrection — themes that align with

[107] Even if the Demna font was not covered by a dais or *ciborium*. Courtois 1955, 117
[108] MacCormack 1990
[109] Jensen 2011, 45
[110] Jensen 2011, 70

the ritual of baptism. The cross further reinforced the visual connection between the neophyte and Jesus since he, like the neophyte, was baptised and transformed. Moreover, the neophyte stands on the monogrammatic cross representing Jesus, located in the bottom of the basin during his or her baptism.

The Dove

The image of the dove [FIG. 2.5] is located in the lobe between the box and the articulated dome. The bird is placed between two lilies, on a dark field. Two staurograms and apocalyptic letters, depicted in red *tesserae*, frame the flowers on either side. The bird, carrying a red cross on its back, flies down from right to left and was first thought to carry an olive branch in its beak, which led to its identification as the dove Noah released after the flood.[111] Consequently, the box depicted in the alcove to the left was understood to be Noah's ark. Yet importantly in a baptismal context, the symbolism of the dove stands on its own as the Holy Spirit.

During Christ's baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist, the synoptic Gospels record that the dove appeared overhead, as the Holy Spirit descended toward Jesus, like a dove.[112] Imagery from the third-century catacombs of Saints Peter and Marcellinus depict a dove similarly descending upon the neophyte during a baptism scene, bestowing the "Spirit of God" from its beak as it did on Jesus [FIG 1.4]. The dove is represented in flight on the Demna basin's wall, instead of above the neophyte's head, because of the spatial and physical constraints of the baptistery design. Carrying a cross on its back, the dove bestowed the gift of the Holy Spirit onto the neophyte as it did onto Jesus during his baptism. Although the dove is not always depicted in baptism scenes, its written and pictorial association with Christ's original baptism in the Jordan explains its presence here without having to resort to the story of Noah.

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[111] Courtois 1955, 117
[112] Luke 3: 22

The vase

The depiction of the tipped vase located opposite the dove, is flanked by birds [FIG 2.7]. The vase echoes the full craters depicted on the baptistery floor and can be understood on both practical and symbolic levels. Initially, the vase was thought to depict the chalice of milk and honey offered to new Christians after baptism, and was thus regarded as a further allusion to the bee discussed above. It is far more logical to infer that the vase represents an implement used during the ritual of baptism itself to pour water over the head of the initiate. This method of baptism by aspersion is suggested in Demna by the baptism pool's physical configuration. The image of the vase may be included to record its donation by patrons, but this would be difficult to prove in light of the fact that ritual items are often depicted in Roman art without necessarily being associated with patronage. The image of the vase provided the Demna ritual with water, in both practical and symbolic terms. The idea of living water is also introduced to the viewer by fish, mammals (dolphins) and sea creatures (cuttlefish) swimming in the mosaic, brought to life by reflection and refraction on the surface of the water when the basin is really filled with water. The ritual itself would have also required the use of a vase-like implement to tip water over the neophyte. Viewers thus witnessed in the image a clever interplay between art, function and ritual.

The Box

The box located to the left of the dove is rectangular, displays four feet and has been described as possessing a square black "clasp" on its front, as well as an open lid [FIG 2.6]. One might be tempted to identify it as an *acerra*, or incense box, as kept by Roman elites for fragrances.[113] Although the use of incense was attested in Christian ritual, there is nothing else to suggest that this image of the box represented an *acerra.*[114] After it was initially described as a chest or trunk with feet in the shape of a house, scholars quickly conflated the

[113] Pybus 1999, 8
[114] Jensen 2011, 140

image with depictions of Noah emerging from the ark. The dilemma with the image does not lie, as Jensen suggests, with the box-like nature of the ark representation, but rather with the singularity of its representation in a baptismal context.[115] Since the presence of the dove is easily explained in this context, it is reasonable to ask whether this box might represent something altogether different from Noah's ark. For example, it has been suggested that it might represent a reliquary or the Ark of the Covenant, but there is little pictorial, epigraphic or contextual evidence to support either proposition.[116] Before dismissing the identification of the box as Noah's ark, we must briefly consider depictions of the Noah narrative in early Christian and early Jewish traditions.

In early Christian depictions, Noah is associated almost exclusively with funerary contexts, where vignettes depicting Old Testament stories are linked by a central theme of salvation [FIG. 2.13]. Noah appears in third-century catacomb paintings and on sarcophagi as a lone figure emerging from the top of a box-like ark, usually in the *orant* pose or alternatively, extending his arm(s) toward a dove or bird [FIG. 2.12]. His identification is unambiguous, and this vignette comes to represent Noah's salvation because it captures a specific moment of the narrative unique to the Noah story, when the dove returns to him with a twig in its mouth to indicate the receding flood.[117] Noah also appears as part of a cycle of Old Testament images (associated with the theme of salvation), first depicted on sarcophagi and later on terracotta lamps and plates as well as in minor arts and medals [FIG. 2.14]. Although these images are characterised as narrative, it is important to note that rather than refer to one story, this "narrative" in fact selects and inserts within its pictorial cycle specific and recognisable images borrowed mostly from the Old Testament: Adam and Eve, the Akedah, Moses striking the rock, Jonah, and the like. Even through there are relatively few the images of Noah in early Christian art, the context for these is exclusively funeral: to date, there exists no evidence of Noah's ark, or Noah, represented in a baptistery.[118]

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[115] Jensen 2011, 267
[116] Jensen 2011, 268
[117] Genesis 8: 11
[118] The only instances of Old Testament imagery depicted in a baptistery are the images found in the Dura Europos baptistery. There are possibly two more examples in Ravenna's Orthodox baptistery,

In the Demna font, the absence of a human figure is particularly telling, because no artistic tradition depicted the Noah narrative without at least human representation.[119] Even in the Jewish artistic tradition, which favours the representation of animals emerging from the ark after the flood event, Noah's children are mentioned in an inscription [FIG 2.15].[120] This interesting Jewish idea of a more universal salvation differs from the Christian concept of personal salvation, yet its imagery still includes human figures (or at least identifiers). In other words, even if Jewish imagination was captured by a different element of the Noah story, the Jewish pictorial tradition still identified a character of the story through an inscription, for example. Interestingly the absence of a Noah figure in the Demna font did not prevent scholars from persevering with their observations. Some concluded that the focus of the image was not Noah's salvation *per se*, but rather that it was on the ark as an instrument of Noah's salvation in associated catechism.[121]

> The ark of Noah, too, was precisely a foreshadowing of the Church of Christ: at that time, while all on the outside were perishing the ark only saved those who were [inside it]. By this figure our attention is plainly being drawn to the unity of the Church baptism…unless they repent and turn to the one and only, the saving waters of the Church.[122]

Despite the association between Noah's salvation and baptism in Patristic texts, there is no evidence that these texts led to illustrations of Noah or his ark in a baptism context. One could argue that the absence of Noah emerging from the box coincides with the absence of human figures in the Demna font, suggesting that the neophyte represented Noah. Yet the font's iconography and layout focuses on a Christ-centred theme that was no longer linked to Old Testament exemplars. Here in fact the neophyte supplanted Jesus, for example through the placement of the monogrammatic cross at the bottom of the basin and the image of the cross under the *ciborium*. Although the possibility that the box represented Noah's ark

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where Daniel, flanked by two lions and Jonah and the monster appear in niches, depicted in stucco. There is doubt as to whether these works were original, however.

[119] The animals coming out of the ark refer to Gen 8: 17-19, where God command Noah to get out of the ark and take with him every animal so that they may multiply.

[120] Dvorjetski, 2005, 153-154

[121] Février 1959, 152

[122] Clarke 1984, 87-88

cannot be wholly discounted, it is improbable. The emerging iconography is Christian in its orientation and no longer relies on Old Testament figures to define salvation. Rather, salvation is attained through Jesus sacrifice and triumph over death. Thus, salvation becomes triumph. The subject of this triumphal art shifts from Old Testament stories to Jesus and, as we will discuss in further chapters, those who emulated him through their sacrifice: martyrs and saints. As modern viewers, we benefit from a simultaneous view of images that span across both time and geography. Christian iconography emerged from an exclusively funereal context, where salvation and unity was expressed through Old Testament iconography such as the Noah story. It has, by the fifth century, emerged as a more personal expression of belief, appearing on smaller portable objects such as medals, caskets and the like. This renewed iconography has also filled a monumental and communal purpose, the larger spaces of which allowed for a more triumphal approach, still flexible enough to further specialise to accompany developing ritual and community needs, for example.

The neophyte composed his or her own narrative during the baptism ritual and the images served to conflate the neophyte's ritual with that of Christ. There is a compelling reason to propose that this box image in fact represents an empty throne, foreshortened as a result of the spatial constraints of its location. The *hetoimasia* (ἑτοιμασία), or prepared throne, symbolised the expected return of God. The visual tradition of representing authority in this manner pre-dates Christianity. In the Demna font, when read in conjunction with the cross under the articulated dome and the dove, these symbols represent the Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The image of the tipped vase, we will see below, refers to the depictions of the river Jordan, illustrated in the domes of the Neonian and Arian baptisteries.

2.3 Extant Baptism Imagery In Ravenna Baptistery Domes

The Neonian baptistery was built atop a Roman nymphaeum as a stand-alone octagonal brick structure. Its transformation into a baptistery began under bishop Ursus during the early fifth century and was completed under bishop Neon, who also added the mosaics after 452. Mosaics decorate the multiple levels of arches that support the dome, as well as the dome itself [FIG. 2.16]. The baptism font, not original, dates from the twelfth or

thirteenth century. The dome mosaic was restored during the nineteenth century.[123] The lowest concentric circle or ring of the dome's mosaic depicts four lavishly prepared thrones under articulated domes that alternate with four ornate displays of Gospels books, also placed in decorated apses [FIG. 2.17]. Further study might establish a link between the number of these Gospels and prepared thrones (four) to Karl Lehmann's study on Christian domes.[124] Because Christ is already depicted in the central medallion of the dome, the alternating Gospels and prepared thrones are best understood as depicting God. The twelve apostles appear in the second, inner tier [FIG. 2.16]. They are named, and hold crowns in their veiled hands. The scene in the apex of the dome is inscribed within a circular field on a gold background. This depiction of Jesus being baptized by John, witnessed by an anthropomorphic depiction of the Jordan as a small old man with a vase and garment in the right-hand side, is positioned directly above the neophyte being baptized [FIG. 2.18]. The combined presence of the Holy Spirit, Jesus and God symbolise the Trinity bearing witness to the baptism ceremony unfolding below.

The Arian baptistery was built nearby at the end of the fifth century under Theodoric. It is a smaller and less elaborate structure than its orthodox counterpart. The décor is not as impressive as the Neonian baptistery either, yet the layout of its dome mosaic is strikingly similar and retains rich gold and jewel tones [FIG. 2.19]. A procession of twelve apostles moves across the lowest concentric ring of the dome, following Peter and Paul, who meet on either side of an *hetoimasia,* where a jewel-decorated cross rests on an elaborate cushioned throne [FIG. 2.20 – 2.21]. The central baptism scene inscribed within the medallion at the apex of the dome shows a naked and beardless Jesus standing waist-deep in the Jordan river, again represented as an old man. John places his right hand on Jesus' head while a dove flies from heaven directly above Jesus with something emanating from its beak. All three figures (Jesus, John the Baptist and the Jordan) are approximately the same size. The alignment between the figures of Christ, the dove and the single *hetoimasia* is intentional. The Son, the Holy Spirit and the Father bear witness to the baptisms conducted in the font below. The

[123] At which time the paten was added in John's right hand during a heavy-handed restoration.
[124] Lehmann 1945

depictions in both baptistery domes reflect the theology of the Catholic and Arian faiths respectively, in their depiction of Jesus, as bearded or youthful. The mosaic representations in these domes share important similarities, but the manner in which Jesus is represented in each is thought to indicate different theological viewpoints between Christian Arian and Orthodox communities.[125]

Baptism depictions located in the central circular medallions of these Ravenna domes illustrate an account of Jesus' baptism that closely parallels its counterpart in the written Gospel narrative. The symbolism and imagery found in the two Ravenna baptisteries clearly show Jesus undergoing the ritual as an adult. As briefly touched upon already, this artistic approach is plausible with the advent of illuminated Bibles, by the sixth century, or through the influence of narrative programmes such as that found in the Sant'Apollinare Nuovo basilica (sixth century), for example. The flat gold ground and the absence of depth or perspective are indicative of a lack of naturalism and suggest more detached, spiritual and extemporal depictions. Further, the round shape of the dome medallions and their location, at the architectural apex of the building, suggest a more heavenly and cosmological significance to the dome's illustration.[126] The central position of these images points to a tradition where such mosaic images located in baptistery domes were commonplace, but no longer extant.[127] Thus, we can conclude that from the fifth century, depictions of baptism, in a baptismal context, showed Jesus receiving grace through submitting to the ritual. This proposed tradition further provides a context in which viewers were familiar with baptism dome iconography and its meaning.

The main attributes of Jesus' baptism are represented succinctly in both the Neonian and Arian domes, thus defining fifth-century baptism dome iconography. The following figures occupy the medallions: John the Baptist, clad in an animal skin or *exomis,* baptising a

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[125] This despite restorations to both mosaics. Jensen concluded that, for lack of textual evidence, the differences in the representations of Christ expressed pictorially must be an indication of different theological expression. Jensen 2011, 123

[126] McVey 1983, 109

[127] Ristow 1998, 93-94

nude, adult Jesus who stands in the in waters of the river Jordan, personified and holding a tipped vase from which the living water used for the ritual flows. Such ancient representations of a river deity are identified as a feature in images depicting the baptism of Christ and still remain in much later artistic compositions.[128] The Holy Spirit, represented as a dove, descends toward Jesus. The central position of Jesus' baptism scene, the layout and concise composition of images and the subjects depicted in these domes command the space. The scene illustrates the foundation ritual of the baptism of Jesus directly above the font where, in turn, neophytes receive the sacrament.

The main attributes of Jesus' baptism are also illustrated in in the first, uppermost register of the Demna font, and ritual participants fill the roles. In Demna, the tipped vase provides the living water in a similar fashion to the anthropomorphic river Jordan, whose vase is the river's source in the Neonian and Arian baptistery dome mosaics. The dove, articulated dome, and *hetoimasia* in the Demna font represent the Trinity (respectively the Holy Spirit, Son and Father) bearing witness to the sacraments taking place in the baptistery. This interpretation suggests that the Demna baptistery font is best understood as an inverted dome, and the baptism font's mosaic goes further in underpinning the plausibility of this interpretation, as images are presented in layers of concentric circles that segregate meaning, a commonly used technique in dome imagery.[129] As discussed, symbols located in the uppermost layer of the Demna font are not covered with water and so remain visible to all present during the ritual. They refer to the attributes that have come to be associated with Jesus' baptism at the time, that are represented in monumental settings, almost exclusively on baptistery domes. Further, the bottom of the font is circular and is reinforced, visually, by decorative borders that frame the staurogram and apocalyptic letters. This pictorial device mirrors the apex and medallion of the domes. Salvation was initially identified as the underlying theme of the font's iconography, but this interpretation did not explain all the font's elements in a cohesive manner.[130] I suggest the triumph of Christ's resurrection and a

[128] Jensen 2011, 126

[129] Such as can be found in the domes of the Orthodox and Arian baptisteries in Ravenna and in S. Giovanni in Fonte in Naples for example.

[130] For example, when identifying Noah's ark as an image in the font associated with salvation achieved through the Church.

new relationship between God and the faithful are a better theme to analyse the font's symbolism. Although some parts of previous analyses were valid when explaining the presence of the fish for example, no theory accounted for all the images of the uppermost layer. The orderly placement and selection of the trees, birds, fish and sea life, reflect a manifestation of paradise. Crucially though, the more symbolic attributes of Jesus' baptism, such as the vase, throne, cross under a *ciborium* and dove, allow for an overarching explanation of the baptistery's iconography as a dome.

Correlation is not causation; however, and these striking similarities indicate the coherence and power of the iconography surrounding baptism, as well as awareness of this visual programme. The knowledge of a certain mobility of population, talent and ideas is also well-established in Late Antiquity and adds to this discussion.[131] In the case of Demna, someone cleverly allocated resources to decorate the basin as if it were a dome, borrowing from iconography associated with the baptism of Jesus found in baptistery domes. No figures were depicted and this directed viewers' attention to the ritual's participants, redefining the relationship between art and viewer, as viewers actively participate in and become part of the artistic display. Patrons and artists thus set the stage and represent the sacred time of ritual by integrating symbolism clearly associated with the baptism of Jesus. The neophyte takes His place during the ritual, beginning his life as a Christian.

In North Africa, few freestanding baptisteries were built as structures with a centralised plan and a dome. Furthermore, no domes survive, so it is difficult to address whether they were decorated or speculate about the nature of any décor. In areas such as Ravenna and in other cities across the Mediterranean elaborate mosaics, paintings and stucco work embellished baptistery domes and walls. We know this because these structures survived. The availability of skill and resources, local tastes and the monumental aspects of the baptisteries in question contributed to their ornate embellishment. By contrast, North African Christians demonstrated a propensity to use pavement mosaics, displaying imaginative and rich iconography in ritual settings especially. Evidently, it is difficult to

[131] Grey 2011, 49

determine whether baptistery walls were decorated in North Africa, or to determine the roof structure in most cases because of the buildings' state of conservation. Khatchatrian's catalogue provided only one confirmed example in North Africa where a dome was built to cover a baptistery: a baptistery in Tabarka, where its octagonal structure shared part of a wall with the square basilica next to it, and two other structures in Carthage (Bir Ftouha and Damous El Karita) that could have accommodated a dome.[132] From a structural standpoint, domes require strong supporting walls and a few clever architectural adaptations to allow for a seamless fit between a square or octagonal base and a round dome top. Domes remained a widely employed architectural device in a Christian context and, along with apses, came to define church form in the Byzantine period. Christians retained the use of the dome because they could ascribe meaning to the shape, as architectural structure itself underpinned the celestial meaning of dome iconography.[133] The vast majority of the 55 floor plans collated by Khatchatrian for the North African region do not indicate the use of dome-topped baptisteries. This may suggest that decorated fonts fulfilled the role similar to a baptistery dome.

Lehmann set out to explain the origins of the "vision of heaven" that Christianity captures and to determine the possible pagan models that served and evolved into Christian dome imagery. One cannot establish a direct correlation between the canopy of heaven described by Lehmann and the Demna font because here, the argument is that this font is an inverted dome. Christians ascribed additional meaning to the dome or vaulted ceiling.[134] As the dome became an important part of baptisteries, both architecturally and decoratively, one can infer that domes were created or integrated into the fabric of the building in other ways, when an actual architectural dome could not be accommodated in the building. The structure of the Demna font and its visual programme frame a bountiful and peaceful creation, whilst referring to the Trinity and including the ritual's participants. The earthly manifestations in Demna have as their counterpart the divine representation of Ravenna's

[132] For Tabarka, Baratte 2014 23-24; the identification of KHAT 249, 250 as baptisteries remains uncertain.
[133] McVey 1983, 37
[134] As did Mithraism. Geden 1990

extant baptistery domes. In Demna, initiates are immersed in the art itself and participants possibly provide some of the pageantry captured by the processions depicted in the Ravenna dome mosaics. The process is transformative for all attendants.

Although the representations of Christ's baptism differ slightly between the Arian and Neonian baptistery depictions, they are still similar enough to draw some conclusions about baptism dome iconography. In a departure from Lehmann's interpretation, wherein Christian domes are assimilated with "the vision of heaven depicted in painting or mosaic" as the "culminating theme of the theological decoration of religious buildings", the iconographic programmes of the baptistery domes in Ravenna do not overtly allude to heaven.[135] Nor do these programmes represent, as Lehmann's critique expressed, a residual manifestation of astronomical imagery.[136] Because the symbolism in the Ravenna baptisteries is first and foremost baptism-related, the domes' iconographic programme can be considered the culminating theme, in this case, of a specific baptism theology. The imagery also serves to reflect a spiritual, or perhaps celestial, parallel to the baptisms taking place in the font directly under each dome. This observation is supported by the flat manner in which the images are depicted, as described above. The symbolism these Ravenna baptistery domes carry is subtle; obliquely, the imagery refers to the human nature of Jesus, as John the Baptist baptises him. These mosaics also capture the moment Jesus is recognized as the Messiah, underscoring the powerful transformative aspects of the ritual. Redemption and salvation are secured through baptism as neophytes are first reborn as Christians, then resurrected in God to eventually attain paradise. Another important theme mentioned by Lehmann's analysis of early Christian dome iconography is the passage of time. He argued that this is usually represented by the presence of the Seasons, for example.[137] In the Demna font, one could argue that the fruit-bearing trees serve to represent the cycle of time, in human terms. The presence of apocalyptic letters (α and ω) in several places in the font, more notably in the bottom, also points to a symbolic illustration of eternity. The iconography of the Demna

[135] Lehmann 1965, 1
[136] Mathews 1982, 13
[137] Lehmann 1945, 8

font may celebrate the "joys of paradise" and serve to highlight the ultimate benefit of baptism, where one ends up in a heavenly garden after a life well-lived.[138] This eschatological interpretation of a new beginning differs from previous interpretations.

Lehmann further established, through several examples, how heavenly floor mosaics reflect ceiling decorations.[139] Although he cast a wide net chronologically, his demonstration provides evidence that three-dimensional details of a complex ceiling structure were sometimes reproduced on the floor, despite not being a structural requirement. These more-or-less intricate ceiling designs were laid out on the floor's flat surface and retained the spatial distribution defined on the ceiling scheme through the use of coffers and frames, which mirrored the layout of architectural and structural elements.[140] There is precedent, then, in floor mosaics visually mirroring the three-dimensional layout of complex ceilings. Consequently, one can imply that the architectural structure of a dome is echoed in the Demna font's shape, layout and depth and that the separation of its imagery into registers and coffers, reinforces this hypothesis. Peering into the font from directly overhead [FIG 2.3] gives the sense of looking up into a dome. The *cantharoi* and decorative vines on the floor surrounding the font draw the eye toward the basin and correspond to decorative elements found in ceilings, usually represented in pendentives or squinches in a domical structure. The round shape of the Demna basin's lip further accentuates a round dome shape. The rounded ledges or steps created by the font's design suggest and exaggerate depth, or height. These structural features, along with the iconographical similarities already discussed between the Demna font and Ravenna baptistery domes are strong arguments to read the Demna baptism font as an inverted dome.

[138] R. Jensen 2005, 139; Drewer 1981, 533-547
[139] Lehmann 1945, 9
[140] Lehmann 1945, 9

2.6 Conclusion

The configuration of the Demna baptistery and the structure and layout of its font mirror the spatial and structural organisation of a dome. From a square floor, the quatrefoil basin is inscribed within a circular raised lip that carries the main inscription. The four craters that anchor the floor mosaic composition define a shape similar to pendentives. Structurally, these architectural components support the transition from a square-shaped room to a round dome. In the basin itself, the four outcroppings and the alcoves they form, as well as the steps are suggestive of four arches holding up a dome. Moreover, the indications of poles on the lip of the basin (red squares) are placed at what one might describe as "the four corners of the heavenly circle."[141] Although the images in the basin are not *stricto senso* depictions of heaven, there is a strong argument for interpreting the fonts' iconography as baptistery dome iconography.

The architecture and décor of early Christian churches led the worshipper to a culmination, where they were in the presence of God, represented in an apse for example. A shift in pattern redefined this environment to one where the worshipper is immediately in the presence of the divine and a sacred environment. These artistic changes, in broad terms, highlight changes in liturgy and epigraphy as the Church further defines itself.[142] Further, they mark a shift in the relationship with the viewer. Even though this broader discussion concerns churches and basilicas, it is still applicable when considering the pictorial programme of the Demna baptistery and basin itself, if we approach it as an inverted dome. As a transitional space by nature of the ritual performed therein, the importance of baptism is all-encompassing as it determines the start of an individual's life as a Christian, paralleling the start of Jesus' ministry after his baptism by John.

This chapter proves the cohesive nature of the Demna font mosaic pictorial programme and proposes that the baptistery and its mosaic font be understood as an inverted

[141] Lehmann 1945 , 3
[142] Spieser 1995, 443

dome. In addition to the physical shape and layout of the basin, the placement of images in the font's mosaic suggests this approach when replaced within the broader contemporary artistic and architectural productions of baptistery art and iconography. This holistic interpretation removes ambiguities and explains the entirety of the mosaic images in one comprehensive programme, something that previous theories, which identified the mosaic's theme as salvific, were unable to achieve. It would be interesting to analyse the iconography of other baptism fonts, such as the elaborately decorated font at Bekalta, to see if similar conclusions can be drawn [FIG 2.22]. The following chapter challenges the established date for the construction of the Felix basilica. It provides evidence to support community involvement in changing the layout and function of the building in response to the congregation's needs, as opposed to unfolding historical events. In addition, new research provides a further basis on which to challenge the alleged sixth-century date assigned to the Demna font.

3: Dating the Felix Basilica and Baptistery in Demna

The aforementioned analysis of the Demna font's iconography re-places the imagery within the fifth-century production context of baptistery dome decoration. This chapter re-examines the established chronology of the Felix basilica and proposes that both the basilica and baptistery were built roughly at the same time, during the fifth century. Only one piece of datable material evidence, a hoard of small coins, was discovered at the site and the interpretation of its context is doubtful. Christian Courtois, Jean Cintas and Noël Duval have shaped our understanding of the Felix basilica's archaeology and chronology, and their interpretations about the site's history remain, on the whole, unchallenged. With respect to chronology, these early conclusions shaped the current practice of linking the site's history to every aspect of a region's history, instead of using the material evidence as a starting point. This is problematic, as the site's evidence is made to fit into this framework, rather than being interpreted on its own merits. The evidence of occupation and conquest in North Africa by various groups such as Romans, Catholics, Vandals and Donatists is difficult to unravel. However, contemporary scholars have been better able to gather, study and re-analyse data in a more objective and scientific manner. After a review of previous scholarship, the discussion herein proposes a modern interpretation of the site's chronology based on new discoveries and a recent historical analysis of the region. A closer study of the baptistery's inscriptions will demonstrate that the baptism font's mosaic was laid at roughly the same time as the basilica's funerary mosaic pavement, during fifth century, at the height of mosaic production across the region.

3.1 Previous Scholarship

The baptistery at Demna was first published by Christian Courtois.[143] When the baptistery structure and its mosaic pavement were relocated to the Bardo museum in 1953, another small basin was found in the southwest corner, near the building. This basin may have been located at the end of a narrow courtyard, separated from but adjacent to the

[143] Courtois, 1955

basilica.[144] Alternatively, it may have been located in a small extension south of the ambulatory. The remaining architectural evidence is not sufficient to support either proposition [FIG. 3.1].[145] Courtois described this feature as a baptismal font, despite its awkward shape and location against a small wall outside the basilica [FIG 3.2].[146] There is no evidence to support the possibility that this was the first font to be built alongside the basilica, or indeed that it was even ever used for baptism. There is nothing to indicate whether this first font was covered, how it was used or how it related to the basilica or to any ceremony performed on this site. The small basin was described as an undecorated and slightly oval-shaped, stepped hole, dug out of the ground and lined with cement.[147] No evidence of decoration or mosaic work was recorded. The bottom of the pool had a diameter of 0.46m to 0.51m and an overall depth of 0.93m. Courtois proposed that the construction of this first small basin coincided with the construction of the basilica, in the fourth century. The recorded presence of this font is important, as the only dateable evidence found on site was a small hoard of bronze coins buried within this basin. The implications of this find, and the subsequent conclusions drawn from it, are discussed below.

Courtois' approach assumed that the shape and structure of baptisteries developed in a linear progression. This typological method of architectural analysis was common for the time; however, it yielded little in terms of new information about a building's initial purpose or how it was used.[148] Nevertheless, Courtois placed the construction of the Demna baptistery squarely in the sixth century, because he interpreted its unique shape as a development of another Turkish baptistery dated to the fifth century, at Gulbahçe.[149] He further extended his argument to propose that the donors named on the Demna baptistery's main inscription, located around the font, reproduced the kiosk-like structure they had seen in Turkey — where they were exiled.[150] This theory has no basis in fact, but it did offer a

[144] Courtois 1955, 100
[145] Courtois 1955, 99
[146] Courtois 1955, 100
[147] Courtois 1955, 100
[148] Brandt 2011, 1596
[149] Courtois 1955, 101
[150] Courtois 1955, 122

rather romanticised view of the sort of stories scholars expected to encounter when excavating sites in North Africa. According to Courtois' analysis, the baptistery was considered a separate structure, the history of which differed from that of the basilica. In his report, Courtois also explained the position and layout of the images in the font's mosaic and briefly commented on the baptistery inscriptions, which will also be discussed below.

Courtois based his chronology of the site on the coin hoard found in the first font, which he dated no later than Honorius (r. 393-423). He linked the coins' burial to important historical events unfolding in the region and consequently, he concluded that the small font was abandoned during the first decades of the fifth century. This coincided with Courtois' expectations that the coins were buried in haste, during the Vandal invasions that also caused the community to abandon and fill in the small font. This explanation differs from his initial suggestion that the small font was abandoned because it was too small. The baptistery and its decorated font were built at the later time of the sixth century, probably after the Byzantine re-conquest, which he placed around 523, after the death of Thrasamund.[151]

This line of thinking implies that the community lacked a baptistery for close to a hundred years, even though numerous funerary mosaics were laid in the basilica during the fifth century. It is difficult to understand why the community invested resources in the basilica's funerary mosaic pavement, but they elected not to rebuild their baptistery. Furthermore, it is difficult to explain what mechanism, if any, local Christians had in place to accommodate baptism, an indispensable community ritual during that time. The fact that members of the congregation were being interred indicates that the congregation was active and used the Felix basilica during the fifth century. Courtois' argument implies that the community was more concerned with burials than with the conversion of new members. This scenario is unlikely at a time when new members were actively welcomed into the faith. Closer analysis of the hoard, as well as a recent review of historical context, will build a clearer and more objective picture of the site and its use by the community.

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[151] Courtois 1955, 104

Jean Cintas and Noël Duval were the next scholars to address the Felix basilica and baptistery in Demna, jointly. They concentrated their research on architecture and funerary mosaics.[152] In his article, Cintas published the results of a thorough survey of the site's remaining ruins, and described in detail the funerary mosaics and artefacts discovered there, including a white marble crater, a conical lid and platter, as well as a glass fragment from a goblet, terracotta lamps and lamp fragments. He also catalogued the mosaic epitaphs, which included 55 names from 50 tombs (some burials contained more than one set of remains) and inventoried the decorative elements and Christian symbols found on the basilica's funerary mosaic pavement. According to him, the distribution of names and religious titles on these tomb covers indicated a certain hierarchy within the pavement, where burials of a priest and lector occupied the apse, and deacons and laypersons were interred in the nave. Women's burials were concentrated to the aisle on the south side. Cintas made few comments about the baptistery pavement mosaic.

Cintas proposed three principal phases of utilisation of the Felix Basilica:

1. "The primitive" basilica and the first basin were built;
2. The introduction of burials and funerary mosaics within the basilica transformed the church into a necropolis during the second phase of its occupation;
3. The cessation of mosaics being integrated within the basilica pavement (although other inhumations continued in the sanctuary).

According to Cintas, this third phase was marked by a sudden departure of the community in reaction to successive waves of invaders, from 647 to 697, which led to the closure of mosaic workshops across the region.[153] The site was then abandoned at an undetermined date, with Cintas noting that there is no evidence of intentional destruction.[154] The fact that early Christians accessed the baptistery from the apse through a hole in the wall confirmed for Cintas that the baptistery was not a feature built during the first phase of the basilica's

[152] Cintas 1958
[153] Cintas 1958, 167
[154] Cintas 1958, 168

usage.[155] Although Cintas conducted a more detailed description of the site, his conclusions regarding its use included few dates.

Noël Duval's main purpose in the second part of this article was to establish the site's chronology through careful analysis of the funerary panels. The study of these tomb covers in relationship to each other and to certain architectural elements led him to establish a more precise order of events than Cintas had. Duval further relied on stylistic observation to confirm this sequence. The timeline he proposed, which is discussed below, was established without reliable evidence that could confirm that the basilica pavement was laid up to a century before the baptistery mosaic. The main problem with Duval's approach is the imprecise and somewhat subjective practice of describing features relative to other features in the Felix basilica and baptistery in Demna, and as detailed as his analysis was, it still did not rely on datable evidence.

Establishing the date of the basilica's pavement was crucial to Duval. Although he was not able to classify some tombs, he categorized the majority of funeral mosaics as belonging to Type I or Type II. This stylistic classification was based on the presence or absence of symbols (such as the monogrammatic cross), the position of the epitaph on the tomb, how the space in the mosaic panel was separated to accommodate symbols and epitaphs, and the level of skill demonstrated in the execution of the panels. Duval then conducted demographic, epigraphic and palaeographic studies of the information contained in the epitaphs and baptistery mosaics inscriptions. He noted that the epitaphs revealed no Germanic names, and that dates were recorded according to Roman tradition of naming the day in relation to the *kalends*, *nones* and *ides*. From this information, he inferred that no Arian Christian was buried under the pavement, and he concluded that the first funerary mosaics were laid in the basilica from the mid-fourth century, soon after it was built. He also noted, in a slightly contradictory fashion, that the language used in the basilica's funerary

[155] Cintas 1958, 160

inscriptions pointed roughly to the fifth century.[156] In other words, he suggested that the funerary mosaics were laid over the course of at least a century.

Duval attributed the two identified mosaic Types (I, II) to the craftsmanship of two separate workshops, based on *tesserae* colours and materials, as well as the overall effect of the composition and rendering of the images. His observations about certain tomb mosaics also led him to conclude that these were designed and manufactured in advance at the workshop and then laid over the grave, regardless of its position in the basilica. This method explained why one of the mosaics (No. 9) is oriented toward the wall, making its epitaph difficult to read. However, it is impossible to determine whether all the tomb mosaics were made in this fashion. Although Duval concluded that Type I mosaics were laid first in the basilica's nave, he allowed for the possibility that the work of both workshops overlapped for a short time.[157] This conclusion relied mainly on similarities between the two mosaic Types, and Duval's observations that some Type II mosaics appear to have been laid before or at the same time as Type I mosaics. He did not explain how this may have worked in practical terms. Duval did little but describe the five mosaics he could not classify.

In his attempt to establish the Felix basilica and baptistery chronology, Duval only considered North African early Christian funerary mosaics as comparanda. In his opinion, this type of pavement was an artisanal production and not of the same quality or category as monumental art. Consequently, he thought it would be "dangerous" to compare these local artistic productions with more luxurious public pavements laid by foreign specialist teams in urban areas such as Carthage.[158] This restriction of comparanda differs from Duval's approach of introducing other buildings as comparanda when discussing the baptistery's configuration. To some extent, his thinking showed an appreciation for local traditions. However, Duval's approach excluded important, well-preserved North African domestic mosaics, such as the Tabarka trifolium mosaic found at the Godmet farm. Furthermore, this

[156] Cintas 1958, 9
[157] Duval 1958, 237
[158] Duval 1958, 238

restricted approach overlooked the vibrant, active and evolving early Christian art produced during the fifth century.

Duval proposed five phases of utilisation of the Felix basilica and baptistery:

1. The basilica and small font are built during the fourth century — Duval conceded that the only datable evidence found remained the coin hoard, which suggested to him a *terminus ante quem* of the end of the fourth century for the small font;
2. Burials are laid within the pavement, first in the nave from the end of the fourth century and then throughout the building in the fifth century;
3. The southwest corner of the basilica is destroyed, or collapses, at the end of the fifth or during the beginning of the sixth century, probably because of Vandal persecutions;[159]
4. The southwest side of the basilica is restored during the sixth century, undoubtedly after the Byzantine re-conquest and the baptistery is rebuilt during the second half of the sixth century;
5. The final phase dated to the Byzantine or Arab period (seventh century), sees the site ruined.[160]

When establishing the site's chronology, Duval set aside the evidence available in the baptistery itself. He treated the baptistery as a space separate from the basilica, and relied on a biased historical framework to establish the baptistery's date. In his view, the baptistery's mosaic work was carried out by local craftsmen after funerary panels were no longer created or installed in the basilica.[161] Duval's argument about the time gap between the installation of the basilica's funerary pavement and the baptism font mosaic is difficult to defend. He implied that a lack of skills and resources halted the installation of funerary mosaics, yet he did not adequately explain the apparent resurgence of artisan skills that the baptism font clearly illustrated. Following his own statement, this sudden creativity could not be explained by the use of specialist teams. Yet there was a long tradition of geographically-mobile, and skilled, urban craftsmen who travel some distance to carry out a commission.[162] Despite

[159] Duval first suggests that the area collapsed, then states that it was destroyed. Duval 1958, 252 and 265 respectively.
[160] Duval 1958, 265
[161] Cintas 1958, 177. Duval's cataloguing of the tomb mosaics, however, makes mention of a "dolphin" engraved on a tile that is part of the built coffer catalogued 252
[162] Grey 2011, 52

mentioning similarities between the (Type II) funerary and baptistery mosaics, Duval further neglected to assign the mosaic work to an atelier. This is where his explanation of the site's chronology falls short. He did not consider the fact that the baptistery and funerary mosaics were laid contemporaneously. He implied throughout his article that the production and installation of funerary mosaic panels differed so greatly from the production and installation of the baptistery mosaic that they could not have been laid at the same time. Although the contexts of these mosaics differ (baptismal and funerary), they are still mosaics. Context will determine the iconography depicted, but in this case a difference in context (ritual and commemoration, respectively) is not germane to establishing the mosaics' chronology.

The basis for Duval's sequence of events and relative chronology rests on his analysis of the Felix basilica's funerary mosaics and his interpretation of the architectural changes he observed in the remaining evidence. Duval constructed the chronology of the baptistery not by studying its structure and iconography, but by focusing on the architectural changes to the basilica and the stylistic analysis of its funeral pavement. Although he did not say so explicitly, the implication of Duval's chronology is that the funeral and baptismal pavement mosaics were laid almost a century apart, despite the similarities he identified between the Type II basilica mosaics and the baptismal font mosaic. This reconstruction of the chronology still confirms the characterisation of Late Antiquity as a time of upheaval and violent rupture with the events of the fifth century, until a period of "restoration" brought by Justinian's invasion in 534.

Summary

Duval's reconstruction of events is widely accepted in modern scholarship. The baptistery is still considered to be a sixth-century structure, designed as part of a Byzantine renovation and redecoration programme of North African churches that occurred after 534. Scholars have concluded that North African churches fell into disrepair under Vandal

occupation and were more-or-less rebuilt after almost a century of disuse.[163] In fact, the inhumations and funerary pavement mosaics, as well as the addition of the chapels, demonstrate that the community remained active during the fifth century. More importantly, there is little to suggest, at a time where symbolism and artistic tastes changed quickly, that a century had passed between the installation of the basilica's funeral mosaics and the laying of the baptistery mosaic pavement. According to this accepted chronology, the congregation at Demna had no baptistery facilities for some time (almost a century). Yet during this same period the community poured considerable resources into burying the faithful in the basilica and covering the remains with mosaics, as well as extending the building to include chapels. The simpler explanation is that the baptistery was erected during the fifth century, at a time when the community was dynamic and displayed an availability of resources. No evidence supports the premise that during the sixth century the community had sufficient resources or numbers to erect a new baptistery.

3.2 New Chronology

The evidence we have to determine a date for the baptistery comprises the coin hoard, the basilica's remaining architectural evidence, the baptistery itself (relocated to the Bardo) and its inscriptions, all set against the backdrop of contemporary historical events, such as the Vandal occupation (from 429) and the Justinianic era re-conquest (534).

Coins

The interpretation of the coins found buried in the first font is still ambiguous, yet it remains the only datable evidence found in the Felix basilica site at Demna. Courtois explained the coins as a hoard that was hastily buried in the face of a Vandal threat. It is generally thought that people bury coins and precious items during times of unrest and Courtois' account justified what he expected to find — a plausible theory, but one that is not

[163] "Most elaborately decorated baptismal fonts such as the one at Clupea, are from this period". Burns 2014, 96

currently supported by evidence. Neither Courtois nor Duval discussed whether the coins were valuable at the time they were buried. To date, the only justification for their presence remains an historic event that, although important, did not have a demonstrable effect on the community.

Only nine of the 43 coins in the hoard were ever cleaned, which is problematic as these few items underpin the alleged basilica and baptistery chronology. Courtois described the coins as "small" and identified them as follows: one coin from Constantius II's reign, one from Julian's reign, three from Gratian's reign, one from Valerian's reign, one from Theodosius' reign and three from Honorius' reign. Thus, the coins were dated no later than Honorius (r. 393-423).[164] There has been little interest in establishing the denomination of these coins. Numismatics, dating and money distribution is a complex subject, especially in Late Antiquity where it is especially difficult to determine how long coins were in circulation. Recent findings in this field of study demonstrate an availability of coinage toward the end of the third century, when the use of base metal coinage shifted from urban to rural centres. A decentralisation of Roman government rule in the late fourth century may have further boosted these local, rural economies. Consequently, low-denomination coins became plentiful in rural areas of North Africa during the fourth century. Few of the more valuable imperial coins, mostly used for accounting purposes, trickled into regional and local markets.[165] These facts suggest the availability of low-denomination coins in the Demna region. The likelihood, then, is that the coins buried at the Felix basilica in Demna were not valuable bronze pieces. No evidence suggests that the coins were buried as spoils of marauding Vandals. As a result of the state of the coins, the presence or absence of Vandal coins remains unverifiable, but not impossible.

Scholars only ever considered the Vandal invasions to explain the presence of the coins. Hoarding implies an intention to recover the buried objects once the threat had

[164] Courtois 1965, 100
[165] Dossey 2010, 85

passed.[166] One crucial detail was overlooked however, as it appears from descriptions of the discovery of the hoard that the first font was no longer accessible once the baptistery's structure was built. Therefore, there was no intention to retrieve these coins once the danger passed, if indeed they were buried because of, or in anticipation of, Vandal invasions. This means that the person or persons who buried the coins did not expect to see them again. Thus, we must consider another reason for the presence of these coins in the small font.

I suggest that the coins were carefully buried in the small font as a votive offering. Despite the possibility of unrest in the area, the context associated with the Demna coin burial implies that it was a voluntary and deliberate action, because the items buried could not be retrieved later. Further, the location and placement of the coins in the first font, in a ritualised context, cannot be overlooked. The coins were placed in a Christian sanctuary and more specifically, in a baptismal space.[167] If this is the case, Courtois' identification of the first basin as a baptism font — or at least as a structure used in association with baptism — makes sense, as a font was a logical location in which to place an offering as the community prepared to build the baptistery. These clues strongly suggest that the coins were a votive hoard that was never meant to be recovered, and, that they were offered for ritual purposes. The timing of the burial is important because it suggests a short gap of time between the filling in of the first font and the construction of the baptistery. We can infer that the first font was filled in intentionally and that the coins were included in its burial. We can also plausibly infer, because of the location and context of the find, that the coins were buried as part of a ritual or in the very least, were buried as a religious act.

It is accepted that votive objects are buried in sacred places as material gifts, as a sign of gratitude or to fulfil a promise, for example. Coin burials as grave goods were commonplace in Antiquity and this tradition persisted. Such a practice is still recorded in a Christian context, but here in Demna, the context is not funereal. Evidence that Christians buried objects and coins within sanctuaries has been found in other Roman provinces. In

[166] Moorhead 2010, 1
[167] I refer here to the baptistery, not the first font whose function is still not clear.

Roman Britain, Christians commonly buried ritual hoards as an "option open to them as a means of expressing their beliefs."[168] The buried objects carried enough significance to contribute meaning to a community's religious experience. Evidence of this practice was also found in Roman Lusitania (a region that includes modern day Portugal and parts of Spain). There, ten fourth-century Roman coins were discovered sealed in the floor of the Torre de Palma basilica, near the altar.[169] John S. Huffstot suggests that the deposition of these coins can be understood as a religious act or perhaps, that the coins were merely included in the fabric of the building as part of its construction. Coins were tangible symbols of wealth and were used as votive objects from an early date, but Huffstot still entertains the possibility that this deposition was a secular event.[170] These provincial finds indicate that coin deposits in Christian sanctuaries may be a more widespread practice than current material evidence lets on. Indeed, in Demna the coins were discovered because the baptistery was removed, and this in itself is not common practice. This interpretation of the evidence allows the existence of the baptistery to serve the community in the fifth century and it accounts for the presence of both fonts. If the first font had ever been used for baptism, it may well have become obsolete as the community grew. This explanation also supports an earlier date of the fifth century for the baptistery's construction. The burial of votive objects and coins in a Christian sanctuary is not a unique phenomenon, but this examination opens up the topic for further discussion.

Material evidence discovered since Duval's time also offers an opportunity to revise the alleged timeline of the Felix basilica. In a 2005 article, Taher Ghalia observed that several objections still remain to invalidate its alleged fourth-century construction date:

- the lack of solid, datable evidence;
- the opulent style of the mosaics (namely, Type I), which contrasts dramatically with more austere funerary mosaics dated with certainty to the fourth century;

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[168] Carver 2005, 115
[169] Huffstot, 1998
[170] Huffstot 1998, 224. Here the author refers to the coins or proto-coins found buried in the foundations of the Artemision in Ephesus, erected in the seventh century BCE.

- the exuberance of the iconography and "joyful" outlook it conveys, something Ghalia claims that mosaics do not display before the fifth century.[171]

Ghalia reviewed the data from newer excavations carried out at Demna and Menzel Yahia-Tafekhsite.[172] From these, he drew attention to similarities between the building methods used in the construction of the Felix basilica, and those observed in a group of warehouses discovered less than 100m away.[173] These buildings were reliably dated, through ceramic analysis, to the fifth century. Consequently, Ghalia proposed that the Felix basilica was built during the fifth century, challenging Duval's established chronology of the site. Further, Ghalia argued that the mosaics located in the Demna baptistery had more in common with mosaic techniques and styles attributable to the fifth century. Moreover, he maintained that the complex iconographic programme displayed in the baptistery font foreshadowed the Byzantine era. Ghalia relied less on historical conjecture and more on material evidence to argue that the baptistery was a transitional monument, dated to the end of the fifth or beginning of the sixth century.[174]

Nothing in Courtois', Cintas', Duval's, or Ghalia's interpretations rules out the possibility that the baptistery mosaics were laid in the fifth century, at the same time as the funerary mosaics in the basilica. The approach that treated the baptistery as a monument separate from the basilica, consequently resulting in the analysis of the mosaic pavements also being treated in isolation from one another, led to mistaken interpretations. Duval's analysis clearly separated the fabrication and installation of funerary mosaic tomb covers in the basilica and the laying of the baptistery mosaics, but without explanation. Even if the processes surrounding the production of these mosaics differed, Duval's argument that mosaics were no longer manufactured in workshops when the baptistery pavement was laid during the sixth century cannot be verified. Furthermore, the idea of making something as

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[171] Ghalia contends that this iconographic expression of felicity is contingent upon the exegesis of New Testament texts. This textual exegesis is attested from the end of the fourth century. Although this literary argument is tenuous, Ghalia's other arguments are convincing. Ghalia 2005, 848

[172] Ghalia 2005, 847

[173] Ghalia 2005, 849

[174] Ghalia 2005, 853

fragile (yet heavy) as mosaic in a workshop and then transporting the item to site is difficult to defend. Whether funerary or baptismal, the context does not affect the manufacture or availability of mosaic resources, but it does affect the iconography and design. In fact, Duval himself points out similarities between the basilica and baptistery mosaics. Yet following Duval's arguments about the site's chronology, one would expect — as Ghalia mentioned — to identify sufficient differences between the funeral and baptismal mosaics to indicate that the pavements were laid a century apart. The baptistery was part of the basilica, even though it established a separate ritual space with its own specific ritual needs. But even as the purpose and message of the mosaics varied between worship and funeral commemoration on the one hand, and the performance of baptism on the other, this difference in meaning and context does not prevent the mosaics themselves from being laid during the same period.

Because previous scholars linked the Felix basilica and baptistery's chronology to the disruption they expected as a result of Vandal invasions (429-534), we must also consider the possible impact of these historical events. Courtois first mentioned the invasions in relation to the coin hoard, and Cintas and Duval noted damage to the southwestern side of the basilica, which they more-or-less attributed to Vandal invasions. Most of what is known about Vandals has come from written sources such as Victor Vitensis, and although he reported the facts correctly, the invaders were portrayed in very negative terms.[175] The main issue when studying Vandals in North Africa is what little trace of their occupation they left behind. Unless a detailed stratigraphy can be provided and carefully excavated, Vandal occupation is extremely difficult to determine.[176] Therefore, archaeology still relies mainly on coinage to provide dating evidence of these sites.[177] Although the Felix basilica shows no sign of deliberate destruction or fire, the following section attempts to characterise the economic and religious impact that Vandal invasions had regionally.

[175] Leone 2007, 39
[176] Leone 2007, 129
[177] Leone 2007, 40

Recent studies demonstrate that, in general terms, the North African economy benefitted from a continuation of the prosperity it enjoyed before the Vandal invasions, rather than the dramatic decline previously anticipated and accepted by earlier scholars. This wealth is thought to be due, in part, to the abolition of the Roman *annona* taxation system, which led to growth and even to a revival of regional economies under Vandal rule. This economic context was helped by the decentralisation of the Roman governing systems.[178] Vandal rulers quickly sought to establish links with the West, overseen at the time from Ravenna (402-476) and then with the East, as power shifted to Constantinople. The availability of Roman expertise and knowledge in Carthage, for example, remained (notwithstanding invasions) as well as a surprising amount of wealth.[179] African Red Slip Ware, which is Roman, not Vandal, was prized as tableware in Italy, and these specialized items found new markets in the eastern Mediterranean.[180] Amphorae exports remained consistently high also, as did the processing of salted fish during the fifth century.[181] There was little disruption to agricultural production, such as olive oil, as most landowners remained to till their land, with revenues redirected to Carthage instead of Rome, or Ravenna.[182]

On a provincial level, Zeugitana (where Demna is located) was more systematically reorganised after the invasions than the North African provinces of Byzacena and Tripolitana. Even so, several smaller urban areas in Zeugitana show a diversification of ceramics and even an advanced specialisation of items produced specifically for an export market.[183] Some public spaces, such as theatres that were abandoned or damaged during the early fifth century, were redesigned for industrial, domestic or funerary use.[184] These facts

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[178] Merrills 2010, 138

[179] Written evidence suggests the presence of prodigious wealth in Vandal Carthage as attested to by Procopius and Victor Vita. Merrills 2010, 141

[180] M. Mackensen even postulated the existence of a Mediterranean monopoly of North African high-quality ceramic production during the Vandal period. Vessey 2012, 259

[181] Leone 2007, 130, 227

[182] Merrills 2010, 149

[183] A particularly distinctive form of ARS at Sidi Marzouk was common in central Italy, but almost unknown in North Africa.

[184] Leone 2007, 135 and 138

serve to establish an active, prosperous backdrop of economic activity across the province of Zeugitana under Vandal rule. The evidence of wealth and the growth of trade routes during that time show Vandals "as interested (but not interesting) spectators of the gradual transformation of the ancient economy", as opposed to the previously accepted model of an abrupt and violent rupture with the past.[185] On the surface, this overview of North African and Zeugitana's economic prosperity aligns with what is observed in the Felix basilica at Demna during the fifth century, namely the creation of the funerary mosaic pavement, the development of side chapels and the construction of the baptistery.

There is also evidence that Vandal religious policy was not applied evenly across conquered territories.[186] The Vandals were Christian, but practised a non-Nicene form of Christianity. This rejection of the creed (adopted in 325, at the First Council of Nicaea) caused tension between the new Vandal Arian rulers and the North African Nicene Catholic population. Catholic persecutions under Vandal rule are attested as early as 429, but there was no consistent ban on Nicene activity.[187] Bishops were exiled and in some areas, individual acts of violence against clergy and laymen were recorded. The clergy and churches still had important standing in the community, however, which was recognized by the new rulers. Vandal land seizures had more to do then with the new rulers comfortably embedding themselves in the area, rather than with an exercise of religious zeal.[188]

Previous scholars have also identified the Justinianic era re-conquest of North Africa by Belisarius (534) as an important milestone in the chronology of the Felix basilica, arguing that the baptistery was built after this date. They inferred that the Felix basilica benefitted from a building programme to re-establish Catholic orthodoxy across North Africa. Archaeological evidence does demonstrate, at least in Carthage and Lepcis Magna, that the emperor's victory against the Vandals was marked by the construction of monumental

[185] Merrills 2010, 143
[186] Merrills 2010, 139
[187] Merrills 2010, 139
[188] Heather 2007, 140

churches.[189] Justinian's building programme has been understood overall as a display of the Catholic's Church's wealth and power, as well as an attempt to promote a return to Catholic orthodoxy and unity. However, there is little specific material evidence that identifies Justinian's involvement in rebuilding Christian basilicas, over that of the Vandals, for example. Justinian's motivations for taking over North Africa may have been more pecuniary than religious, as modern conclusions about this re-conquest differ from earlier interpretations of this era.[190] Therefore, it is difficult to identify, let alone measure, the impact of such an imperial building programme in smaller locales, such as Demna and the Felix basilica, more specifically.

Summary

New discoveries and historical analysis are challenging the alleged relative chronology of the Felix basilica and baptistery in Demna, as established by Duval in the late 50s. One of the main issues remains the initial separate analysis of the basilica and the baptistery, despite their close association and many similarities, at least in mosaic décor. Duval argued that the mosaics laid in the basilica were clearly a local, artisanal production and, consequently, that it was not appropriate to compare them to monumental works. Yet Duval also stated that the installation of funerary mosaics had ceased in the basilica's nave by the time the baptistery floor was laid. This theory, which suggests a sudden lack of resource or knowledge, further implies the need to bring in external, specialist teams to design and install the baptistery mosaics. In one sense, Duval undermines his own argument because his chronology implies that specialist teams were used after the re-conquest, since locals seemingly had lost their craftsmanship. There was no need, then, to wait for the re-conquest: the community could have hired outside expertise, if required. Moreover, if the funerary mosaics in the basilica were laid up to a century before the ones in the baptistery, one would expect to see a noticeable difference in style or iconography, which is not the case. A comparison between the funerary and baptistery mosaics reveals more similarities than differences in their design

[189] Procopius offered a glimpse of Justinian's undertakings in Carthage and Lepcis Magna. Leone 2007, 242
[190] Merrills 2010, 228

and iconography. The baptistery mosaic, alleged to have been laid after the re-conquest, does not display what Ghalia referred to as a recognizable uniformity of décor.[191] Furthermore, its installation technique pointed to a lesser quality of execution than sixth-century examples.[192] This evidence is explained if we concede that the basilica plan was modified during the fifth century, to accommodate the needs of the community. Resources and community expertise were available during the fifth century to expand the basilica, build the chapels and the baptistery as well as to lay all the mosaic pavements. Modifications made to the basilica plan and décor may or may not have coincided with broader historical events, such as successive invasions, but there is no evidence that these specific events caused these modifications. It is simpler to consider the community as agents of change redesigning the Felix basilica in Demna to meet their changing needs. This is easier to admit if we acknowledge that the basilica was probably built, and certainly utilised and modified, under Vandal rule.

3.3 Baptistery Inscriptions

Another potential clue to the dating of the baptistery rests with its inscriptions. The first inscription a viewer comes across in the baptistery was laid across the threshold. It reads "PAX FIDES CARITAS", "Peace Faith and Love" [FIG 2.4]. This inscription welcomed the participant into the space and marked the appropriate entrance point to the baptistery.[193] The substitution of the more common term "spes", "hope", for the term "pax" recalls Eph 6: 23: "*pax fratribus et caritas cum fide a Deo patre et Domino Iesu Christo*", "Peace to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."[194] The three concepts (Peace, Faith and Love) are "fruit of the Spirit", as mentioned by Paul (Gal 5: 22-23), and appear in several North African inscriptions.[195] As discussed in chapter two, the Holy Spirit bestows these virtues through baptism. This inscription welcomes the faithful to the

[191] Ghalia 2005, 856
[192] Ghalia 2005, 852 and 856
[193] This is reinforced by the fact that the staurogram in the bottom of the font aligns with this threshold inscription. Courtois 1956, 140
[194] Courtois is not surprised by the choice of these three terms and mentions that they appear in other North African inscriptions. Courtois 1955, 105-6
[195] Along with joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control. Augustine also uses these three specific virtues in his writings against Pelagians. Dupont 2013, 102

baptistery promising peace, faith and love to those who were baptized and reminds others of the gifts they already received through baptism. The inscription's location on the threshold served to indicate the entrance to a new ritual space.

The baptistery's main inscription is located around the basin and is read in an anti-clockwise manner [FIG. 2.4]. The inscription identifies the saints to whom the font was dedicated, acknowledges the patrons who commissioned the work, and informs viewers about the purpose of the font's existence: to contain the eternal living water. The complete inscription reads:

> S(AN)C(T)O BEATISSIMO CYPRIANO / EPISCOPO ANTISTE // CUM S(AN)C(T)O ADELFIO PRESBITERO / HUIUSCE UNITATIS // AQUINIUS ET IULIANA EIUS CUM / VILLA ET DEOGRATIAS PROLIBUS // TES(S)ELLU(!) AEQUORI PERENNI / POSUERUNT[196]

Yvette Duval's translation of the inscription insists on the importance of Church unity:

> Le saint et bienheureux évêque Cyprien étant prélat, avec le saint Adelfius prêtre de cette (église de l') unité, Aquinius et sa femme Iuliana, avec leurs enfants Villa et Deogratias, ont posé cette mosaïque destinée a l'eau éternelle.[197]
>
> The holy and blessed bishop Cyprian, prelate, with the holy Adelfius, priest of this church of unity, Aquinius and his wife Iuliana, with their children Villa and Deogratias, laid this mosaic destined for the eternal water.

She interpreted the use of "unitatis" as a warning to neophytes about to undergo the ritual against the perils of Donatism. Using Noël Duval's own argument about the date of the baptistery (sixth century), the reference here to Donatism is a bit anachronistic as the sect no

[196] Epigraphic Database Heidelberg
[197] Duval 1982, 57

longer posed a threat by this time.[198] She also argued that the formula in the inscription is elliptical, and interpreted the use of "huiusce" as specifically referring to the African Church, and not to Catholicism in general, which would be characterised instead as "huiusque ecclesiae unitatis". Whether the saints mentioned were both bishop and priest when the basin was built, or whether Cyprian can be identified as the bishop of Carthage, remains open to interpretation. The association between St Cyprian, Church Unity and Donatism, is easy to make as he wrote *De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate*, (On the Unity of the Catholic Church). Cyprian warned against the perils of schisms, which he placed outside of the Church.[199] Yet it is problematic to interpret all these vague elements as a clear message to an audience prepared for the ritual, at a time when there was no longer a real threat posed by schismatic movements such as Donatism. Duval attributed the terseness of the formula to a possible lack of space that required an economy of words. Despite these restrictions, it is reasonable to assume that the patrons still communicated the essential message of what was important to them. Duval finally suggested that this dedication followed the model of more monumental late-antique examples, where the identification of clergy in an inscription takes precedent over patrons, who merely provided funds to build the baptistery.[200] This way of thinking sets aside the notion that clergy were, or could, act as patrons themselves. That the Demna font owed a debt to monumental constructions indicated an important shift in thinking, which Noël Duval was strongly opposed to, and again suggested a later date for building and dedicating of the baptistery.

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[198] Yvette Duval agreed with her husband that the baptistery was entirely rebuilt during the second half of the sixth century. Duval 1982, 56

[199] The Concept of Unity in Cyprian's *De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate*

[200] "un effacement des dédicants laïques devant les clercs, devenus maîtres d'oeuvres des constructions eccélsiastiques avec mention d'un prêtre après l'évêque du lieu. Pourtant, le role de chacun est, dans les grandes dédicaces, précis: le laconisme de la formule pourrait être due, ici, au manque de place: cum…presbitero marquerait à la fois le hiérarchie et la différence du role des deux clercs. Cette interprétation, qui inclut ipso facto, le sens de la datation, me paraît la plus plausible compte tenu des parallèles dans cette serie d'inscriptions dédicatoires: mais elle n'est pourtant pas certaine. Elle exclut évidemment l'identification de l'évêque de Carthage." Duval 1982, 58

I suggest that the inscription highlights the importance of local community, and translate it as follows:

> (to) the blessed Holy Saint Cyprian, Bishop and Prelate and (to) the Holy Adelfius, priest of this community (huius ce unitatis) – Aquinius, Juliana, and their children/descendants (prolibus) Villa and Deogratias, laid this mosaic for the eternal water.

The epithets "Blessed" and "Holy" associated with Cyprian strongly suggest that the figure referred to is the well-known martyred Saint (200-258 CE), but this is not helpful in assigning a date to the baptistery. This translation differs from another one which read "a priest (Adelfius) in unity with him (Cyprian)" instead of "priest of this community".[201] There is already an implicit link between Saint Cyprian and the Prelate Adelfius, and hence the use of "huiusce unitatis" should emphasize the relationships with the community the font was built for. The use of "antiste" here may further argue for the reliance of the local community on its priest and his role as patron, as it did in other inscriptions.[202]

The names of the patrons, their family members, or holy men mentioned in the inscription do not appear in the census taken from the mosaic epitaphs in the basilica. The family might have outlived the availability of burials, or they might have moved away or simply decided not to be buried in the basilica. The fact that these names do not appear in the basilica's funerary pavement has no bearing on the date of the baptistery, or on the chronology of the site. If the baptistery was built during the Byzantine re-conquest (534) or to celebrate it, one might expect the inscription to mention Justinian, instead of this personalised dedication that refers specifically to the donors, who may have included the names of their descendants to immortalize their lineage.[203] Not only did Aquinius and Julia provide their community with the gift of living water but they also established their status and that of their descendants, and secured their legacy within the community, in a manner similar to that of imperial Roman civic donations.

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[201] Jensen 2011, 215; Palazzo 1992, 118
[202] Caillet 1993, 419, 430
[203] Yasin 2009, 110-115

3.4 Conclusion

The balance of evidence suggests that the Demna community built the Felix basilica and adapted the building to suit their changing needs. They buried their dead within it, commemorated them with funerary mosaics, built side chapels and a new baptistery during the fifth century. Some of these changes occurred under Vandal rule but it is impossible to determine which ones and when. The baptism font was donated by Aquinius and Julia, and the wording of the inscription also secured their legacy and confirmed their standing in the community. Interpreting the burial of the coins as a votive gift and religious act explains the use of the first font, as well as the presence of an offering which could not be retrieved.

So far, I have focused on monuments and iconography that support the Christian initiation ritual of baptism. I have argued that the Felix basilica, its funerary and baptistery mosaics, should be dated to the fifth century, and that the community acted as its own agent of change. The next chapters consider funerary iconography found on two tomb mosaic covers in the Chapel of the Martyrs in Tabarka.

4: The Ecclesia Mater Mosaic

The image known as the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic marked Valentia's tomb in the Chapel of the Martyrs, in Tabarka. Its unique depiction of a basilica was considered to be of very naïve and poor execution and consequently, it was explained as the portrayal of a generic African basilica. Valentia's short epitaph was similarly rationalized as both symbolic and self-explanatory.[204] Whilst some research has been carried out on the mosaic, the context considered thus far has been chiefly limited to Christian artefacts. Overall, scholars agree that the mosaic's image does not depict the church building in which the mosaic was laid, but rather represents a schematic depiction of an "average" North African basilica. The epitaph's expression, "mother church", is understood to refer to the abstract concept of the "Mother Church of Rome", reprised in the mosaic.[205] I will argue instead that this image represented Valentia's local church, in both literal and symbolic fashion.

The purpose of this chapter is to address the contexts of productions and reception of this image, in particular whether the current interpretations of the image — as an abstract representation of typical fifth-century North African basilicas — and the epitaph are still valid. A review of previous scholarship indicates that scholars placed little importance on the viewer's physical position vis-à-vis the mosaic, and his or her grasp of the image. Close study of contemporary artefacts, produced outside the Christian tradition, will show that the treatment of the mosaic's image already sits within long-standing Roman and Jewish artistic conventions. These established practices already illustrated real and important buildings in a complex, multi-perspective fashion that presented many points of view on one plan. A brief look at the continuity and evolution of divine representations in Late Antiquity adds another symbolic layer to the mosaic's image. Whilst previous conclusions about the epitaph indicate that its meaning was to be found in reference to Rome, a more local understanding of the epitaph's wording places it in a contemporary context and better explains the interplay

[204] Gauckler 1906, 197
[205] Gauckler 1906, 191

between the symbolic and representational values of the image. This discussion will also consider what aspects of patronage can be gleaned from the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic.

4.1 Early Christian Funeral Mosaic Production

Early Christians expressed a new relationship with God through burials placed inside city walls and sanctuaries. Because of their belief in resurrection, early Christians did not cremate their dead but instead carried out inhumations. Having the dead close at hand suddenly became important, for commemorative purposes of course, but especially because of the belief that burial in proximity to a martyr's body or relic would further imbue a deceased's remains with spiritual power.[206] These relics and bodies were at first kept in basilicas and chapels. For example, Saint Ambrose arranged for his brother Satyrus to be buried next to a martyred saint, Victor, in the fourth century, in Milan's San Vittore in Ciel D'Oro chapel. Ambrose's eulogy to his brother indicated that Satyrus had not converted to Christianity, had not been baptised and did not die a martyr. Yet the power of this burial location secured Satyrus' standing in the Christian community, so much so that his name came to eclipse that of the local saint. After Saint Victor's relics were translated, or moved, Satyrus was celebrated through a cult of his own.[207] The emergence of such *ad sanctos* burial practices was particularly apparent in North Africa, where the celebration of martyr cults became widespread. Early Christian epigraphy recorded that some North African churches quickly linked altar to relics, to the point where the position of the altar came to represent the location of buried relics.[208] Bodies of the faithful were buried under the floors of churches and their tombs were marked, with more or less elaborate designs, in pavement mosaics. No theory has satisfactorily explained this phenomenon, which emerged simultaneously in

[206] Yasin 2009, 65
[207] Mackie 2003, 128
[208] Yasin 2009, 153

multiple foci across the Mediterranean, but it is thought to relate to cultural, economic and religious practice.[209]

A tomb cover is a small area to work with and consequently, the imagery needed to be succinct and convey a compelling message that was understood by viewers. At the very least, because the size of a basilica's pavement was limited, space was at a premium. The location of each mosaic in the building itself enshrined the deceased's place among the community of the living. In a fashion similar to Roman custom, the location and visibility of these tomb markers was important.[210] In a departure from Roman tradition; however, Christians were moving away from familial bonds in grouping their burials, as they defined themselves instead through their relationship with their congregation and God.[211] The tomb's proximity to a martyr's remains, generally placed within or below the altar, or to the main apse of the basilica also created a type of hierarchy within the burial space: this arrangement possibly reflected the importance of roles carried out by deceased community members while they were alive. Nevertheless, any burial within the confines of a church, or the sacred boundary of the church sanctuary, was a privilege.[212] The Christian sanctuary, or the basilica itself, became limiting and only those who were baptised or neophytes were allowed inside, hence the viewership of any grave marker was restricted. This custom did not extend to all Christians, as some still practiced extramural burials or were buried in cemeteries and necropoleis. Regardless of its position, each decorated tomb displayed how Christians defined their identity through God.

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[209] Breckenridge 1974. See also Yasin 2009

[210] By law, Roman burials were kept outside the city walls. It is thought this was initially done to ward off disease, which has nothing to do with religion. Tombs usually lined roads outside city walls, where visibility was very important. Families were also buried together, including slaves. Romans both cremated and buried their dead, although burial became more popular under the Empire.

[211] Yasin 2009, 91

[212] Yasin 2009, 91

4.2 Chapel Of The Martyrs

The Chapel of the Martyrs was located in Tabarka. A Roman city and small Tunisian port, Tabarka was recorded as an important bishopric in the region.[213] Burials were located within the church building, under its mosaic pavement, and outside its periphery. The modest basilica measured 40 x 15.6 m, and was accessed by steps leading to a three-bayed entrance [FIG. 4.1]. The central nave was flanked by two aisles defined by a series of six Corinthian columns of blue Carystian marble, resting on white marble bases. There were remains of a continuous mosaic floor pavement throughout the basilica, as well as evidence of a cistern. One reached the semi-circular apse by stairs located just behind the altar, which was located on the floor of the nave – a common configuration in North Africa.[214] There is no discernible pictorial programme underlying the surviving funerary mosaic panels. Nor do the epitaphs present a unity of formulae; in fact, this pavement comprised some of the most expressive and unique early Christian tomb markers found to date in North Africa. A lack of other surviving material from the basilica means that it is impossible to ascertain the existence of a more uniform pictorial scheme that may have existed elsewhere in the chapel. Overall, scholars agree that the height of North African tomb mosaic production occurred roughly during the fifth century, an accepted date for the purposes of this discussion.[215]

The *Ecclesia Mater* funerary mosaic simultaneously depicts the top, interior, exterior and frontal views of a building in a single plane [FIG. 4.2]. The mosaic measures 2.20 m X 1 m, was oriented roughly east-west and was located in a prime position within the Chapel of the Martyrs' pavement: toward the front of the church, by the first column in the left aisle of the nave [FIG. 4.3]. A thin border of vine scrolls surrounds the main pictorial field. At the extreme right of the image, the entrance is accessed by steps and represented as a curtained doorway. The building's pediment contains a rectangular niche flanked by two smaller round windows. Behind this pediment, in the roof cavity of the building — or on the clerestory — we find the Latin epitaph "ECCLESIA MATER" "mother church", flanked by two small

[213] Gauckler 1906, 177; Downs 2007, 98-99
[214] Krautheimer 1965, 140
[215] Duval 1976; Downs 2007, 1; Breckenridge 1974, 29

flowers and just below it "VALENTIA IN PACAE" "Valentia [rest] in peace". The tiled roof is supported by wooden trusses illustrated in a cut-away view, with their ends shown in profile as solid squares under the tiles. These square shapes could also represent the windows of a second story. The floor of the building is treated as a separate register and features a frieze of birds and flowers, alternating with column bases. This manner of showing column bases is a space-saving way to represent a central nave and two aisles, separated by two colonnades of six blue stone columns with Doric capitals. The birds face left in a procession toward the altar, which is decorated with latticework. Three lit candles rest upon the altar and underneath it, a heraldic pair of birds and flowers flank an item topped with a cross, which could represent martyr relics. At the left of the image is the apse, another important feature of the building, again shown from multiple perspectives, as if a separate building. This apse was accessed by four steps that led to a three-bayed arch, supported by fluted columns of blue stone. This apse or semi-dome's oculus is displaced from the top of the building to its side, in keeping with the depiction's simultaneous illustration of several points of view. There are no representations of human figures in the mosaic.

It is unclear whether the Chapel of the Martyrs was amongst buildings first surveyed in 1892.[216] Although mosaics and mosaic-decorated tombs in the round are noted in early research, the first mosaics recorded within a building were the domestic *trifolium* pavements found in the Godmet farm [FIG. 4.4].[217] Scholars researching early Christianity in North Africa during the late nineteenth century clearly framed their purpose as establishing, through archaeological evidence, a Christian presence in the Tabarka area. With great foresight, yet minimal field research and data-gathering, many funeral mosaic pavements were lifted up and transported to the Bardo Museum in Tunis for further study.

The first record of the Chapel of the Martyrs was filed by Capitaine Bénet, in 1904.[218] Bénet sought to prove the presence of monastic institutions described in the writings of

[216] Toutain, 1892
[217] Toutain 1892, 26
[218] Bénet, 1904

Victor Vitensis. This bishop wrote extensively about the Vandal persecutions of Christians during the fifth-century invasions of North Africa. At the time of Bénet's report, the apse of the chapel stood, albeit without its domed ceiling, and the walls were still covered with plaster. He interpreted the presence of a cistern and a large geometric mosaic panel within the Chapel as evidence of subsequent domestic occupation, but as Joan Downs points out, these features were not unusual for the time in North African churches.[219] Based on other sites, any possible reuse of the basilica would probably have been industrial, something commonly seen from the fifth century across North Africa.[220] Yet there is no evidence of this here. Although he wavered in terms of specifics, Bénet strongly believed that the Chapel and its dead were associated with the monastic movements mentioned by Victor Vitensis, without providing material evidence for his claims.

The unique depiction and subject of the Valentia's tomb, which Bénet observed *in situ*, led him to suggest that the mosaic illustrated the Chapel of the Martyrs itself: "sa reconstitution est facile à faire, car l'une des mosaïques tombales pavant le sol de la basilique représente l'édifice-même."[221] Bénet suggested that the register at the bottom of the mosaic indicated the presence of a crypt, subsequently used as a cistern.[222] He identified Valentia, the deceased, as either one of the Chapel's principal patrons or more simply a member of the congregation commemorated on the mosaic pavement. The importance of women in the Tabarka community is reinforced by the number of burials and their location within the sanctuary.[223] Bénet's observation of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic *in situ* was crucial to its interpretation, because he was able to appreciate how the location and position of the mosaic, and the orientation of the basilica in the mosaic, aligned with the Chapel, defining its reception and meaning.

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[219] Downs 2007, 43. Downs also rejected any domestic utilisation of the building, as its religious raison d'être would still be evident and would have discouraged domestic occupation.
[220] Leone 2007, 135
[221] Bénet 1904, 384
[222] Bénet 1904, 385
[223] Downs 2007, 241

In 1906, Paul Gauckler carried out a thorough study of the Chapel of the Martyrs and its extant 30 mosaics. He disagreed with Bénet's argument that the Chapel was associated with any monastic movement and suggested instead that the basilica fulfilled a more general, commemorative function.[224] To explain this, he first situated the church within an older Christian necropolis, located on the outskirts of the city of Tabarka. Gauckler believed that the basilica was built during the third century (under Constantine, at the latest) on the remains of a second-century cemetery, which had been used during Christian persecutions.[225] Burials were then included in the basilica as early as the fourth century, with clergy and dignitaries buried closest to the altar.[226] Inhumations ceased during the fifth century, a date which coincided with a second wave of persecutions in the area, and the closure of (Nicene) churches under Huneric, in 484.[227] Without material evidence to support his claims, he concluded that the basilica was then ransacked, burned and abandoned. After the Byzantine re-conquest during the sixth century, the basilica remained unused and the grounds were absorbed into the surrounding necropolis. Gauckler's conclusions about the basilica's usage and chronology remain unsupported although he clearly formulated his timeline of the Chapel of the Martyrs around what was, at the time, considered to be historical fact. As Joan Downs points out, he was "reaching for a set of monumental events and personalities" as his suggestions are not based on material evidence from the site.[228]

To move further away from Bénet's monastic interpretation of the site, Gauckler then argued that the presence of an epitaph fragment, found in the Chapel near the altar that read "AD TE SANCTE, PROFECTUS" "may he return to you, holy one", gave the site an important martyrial character.[229] The formula "may he return to you, holy one" is not readily associated with martyrdom and can be found on at least one other epitaph in the Chapel, which will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter of this thesis. This evidence, as

[224] Gauckler 1906, 182
[225] Gauckler 1906, 182
[226] Gauckler 1906, 184. North African Christians connected relics with altars earlier than other Christian groups. Yasin 2009, 153
[227] Gauckler 1906, 185
[228] Downs, 2007, 48
[229] Gauckler 1906, 183; Downs 2007, 47

well as the size of the basilica, led Gauckler to propose the existence of a pilgrimage route that included Tabarka on its itinerary.[230] The basilica's dimensions were in fact modest; however, in 1906 Gauckler had few examples of monuments to use for comparison. The identity of the martyr remains unknown, and there is no solid proof of the existence of a martyr cult. Even so, there is sufficient anecdotal evidence to support the designation of "Chapel of the Martyrs".[231]

Regarding the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic, Gauckler dismissed the possibility that it represented a real building. He insisted instead that the mosaic symbolised, through the epitaph, the "Church, Mother of the faithful".[232] Yet in a somewhat contradictory statement, he also concluded that the term *ecclesia* in the epitaph referred to the building where the faithful worship.[233] Both interpretations are not mutually exclusive, yet Gauckler fails to articulate any argument around this apparent contradiction. He interpreted the artist's point of view as if located outside the sanctuary and to the left — to some extent, this explains the frontal aspects of the mosaic basilica's entrance and the entrance to the three-bayed arch: "Le spectateur, qu'il suppose placé à gauche et au dehors du sanctuaire, aperçoit un bâtiment rectangulaire…"[234] However, this statement is confusing because in all likelihood, when Gauckler refers to the "spectateur" in his text, he is referring to the artist. Yet he did not take into account the mosaic's viewer "spectateur" in his research. Moreover, if an artist were outside the sanctuary, he would still illustrate the basilica's walls. Adopting this position caused Gauckler to restrict (perhaps inadvertently) the potential information he considered in constructing his analysis. Consequently, he examined only a few Christian openwork depictions of architecture, despite his acknowledgement that all Christian sanctuaries are enclosed.[235] Gauckler mentions the Basilewsky lamp and Capsella Africana caskets as comparanda, items that will be discussed in the following section. These observations

[230] Gauckler 1906, 190
[231] Downs 2007, 103
[232] Gauckler (1906), 196-7
[233] Gauckler (1906), 191
[234] Gauckler (1906), 190
[235] Gauckler (1906), 196

support his argument that the image does not depict a real building but rather an abstraction, and from this point on scholars agree with this conclusion.

In her analysis of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic, Margaret Alexander focuses on the larger, more symbolic architectural elements it contains; more particularly, on the three-bayed arch leading to the apse on the left, interpreting this detail as a rudimentary *iconostasis*. This typically eastern structure is found mostly in Cyrenaic churches from Libya, where it separates the nave from the sanctuary. Alexander supported her interpretation by pointing out a subtle change in style and colour of the columns: from blue and white coloured Doric capitals in the nave, to dark red Corinthian capitals supporting the arches. This comparison is interesting, but Alexander's argument is somewhat tenuous. In the first instance, the altar depicted in the mosaic is located in the nave of the basilica, a detail which negates the use of an *iconostasis* (from the Greek εἰκονοστάσιο, icon stand), as this structure's purpose is to separate the nave from the sanctuary. Secondly, the use of the iconostasis points to a specific eastern separation of sacred space not commonly reproduced across North Africa. This observation contradicts Alexander's own analysis of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic's illustration as a generic type of North African basilica. Alexander is brief in her conclusions. She found the mosaic to be a unique, yet appropriate depiction for a funerary setting, symbolic of the Church as the way to salvation. For Alexander, the mosaic is a very literal representation of the *Ecclesia Mater* figure of speech mentioned in the epitaph.[236]

For Krautheimer, the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic represented an "ideal standard basilica."[237] The central placement of the altar, which usually held martyr remains, as well as the triple-bayed arch used to access the apse, are typical features of North African churches. He provided an updated reconstruction and elevation of the basilica, based on the depiction found in the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic [FIG. 4.5]. Examples of such layouts are common across the region and respect the physical arrangements of basilicas in the Latin West: an entrance or atrium, a central nave supported by columns with aisles on either side and ending in a

[236] Alexander 1958, 63
[237] Krautheimer 1965, 141

semi-circular apse.[238] Krautheimer further asserts that the rambling manner in which the basilica is shown on the mosaic is typical of late-antique architectural depictions.[239] Krautheimer's contribution is most helpful in replacing the design of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic's basilica within a wider Mediterranean and North African ecclesiastical building context.

The *Ecclesia Mater* funeral mosaic remains an important schematic depiction of an early church, where the architectural image dominates the pictorial field. Thus far, it is the multi-perspective manner in which the building is treated that has been identified as unique. However, this discussion will demonstrate how, in order to be understood by contemporary viewers, the image of the *Ecclesia Mater* basilica was indebted to a long tradition of illustrating many sides of a building in one pictorial plane. In summary, the literature identifies two possible options as to what the basilica in the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic represents: either it depicts a real building, namely the basilica in which it was placed, or it represents a somewhat abstract and generic type of early Christian African basilica made up of characteristic architectural elements. Still another possibility exists, that the basilica represents a real building that has to date not been identified. Key issues about the mosaic's interpretation also rest on what the epitaph refers to; thus far, it has been explained as referring to the institution of the Mother Church — as scholars currently understand it, the Holy See or Rome. I suggest that the succinct epitaph indicates how the community perceived Valentia, the local Church and its church, at the time.[240]

The idea that the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic depicted a contemporary building other than the Chapel of the Martyrs has to date not been pursued. It is understandable that this task was practically impossible for Gauckler because of a dearth of monumental evidence at the time of his writing. At the other extreme, for Krautheimer the *Ecclesia Mater* basilica was so typical an image that it could represent any number of early North African basilicas, yet this

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[238] Krautheimer 1965, 140
[239] Krautheimer 1965, 141
[240] The epitaph's expression "*Ecclesia Mater"* has been found only one other time in a funerary context. Plumpe 1943, 87

interpretation somewhat sets aside the unique immediate context of the mosaic.[241] Identifying architecture in art was not a unique undertaking; in the nineteenth century, Georges Rohault de Fleury set out to identify the Lateran basilica in early Christian art.[242] For this endeavour, he relied on architectural, geographic and symbolic details and identified an early depiction of the Lateran on a sarcophagus, in the Lateran collection. The image shows the Denial of Peter occurring in front of a building complex which is displayed a multi-perspective manner. Rohault de Fleury identified this group of buildings as the Lateran basilica complex.[243]

In applying this approach to the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic, one must assume, in the first instance, that in order to be recognized by a viewer in the Chapel of the Martyrs the basilica represented had to be a well-known monument; at the very least it needed to be familiar to someone such as the deceased, patron, artist and to the congregation — its audience. A quick survey of famous contemporary buildings, across Rome and North Africa, turns up very few possibilities. The first Roman building that comes to mind when one thinks "dome" or "oculus" is the Pantheon. However, there is no association between the Pantheon and Christianity this early in the late fourth or early fifth century. St John in Lateran, where the 313 Synod of Bishops was held to discuss the Donatist schism, remains a tantalizing yet remote possibility; this first papal residency had a separate, annexed domed baptistery built in 315, but its columns were of porphyry, a detail that differs significantly from the *Ecclesia Mater* depiction. Old St-Peter's basilica, built during the fourth century, possessed two aisles on either side of the nave and is therefore too big to be considered.[244] The Santa Sabina basilica, located on the Aventine and built during the fifth century, did not have a three-bayed arch, or steps, to reach apse.

Across North Africa, both *mausolea* and *martyria* can be excluded, since they were at the time based on a central plan. Only one Tabarka basilica included a domed baptistery, but there is no baptistery depicted on the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic; only a semi-domed apse. Most

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[241] Krautheimer 1965, 141
[242] Rohault de Fleury, 1877
[243] Matt 26: 33-35; Mark 14: 29-31; Luk2 22: 54-57; John 13: 36-38
[244] Krautheimer 1965, 144

Severan basilicas from *Lepcis Magna*, built during the second and third centuries, displayed two apses. Alexander introduced Cyrenaic churches to her discussions about the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic.[245] Most Cyrenaic church floorplans comprised an axial entry and three aisles; however, they seldom included a rounded, projecting apse at the end: rather, the plan's outline remained rectangular and any vaulted or semi-domed apse was inscribed within its rectangular confines [FIG. 4.6]. The design of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic accords great importance to the domed apse depicted on its left side. The presence of the oculus reinforced the idea that light came into this structure from outside, so it was unlikely to be enclosed within a rectangular structure. Consequently, the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic does not depict a Cyrenaic-type church.

This brief overview of Roman and North African basilicas yields no well-known architectural candidates matching the *Ecclesia Mater* inscription, other than the Chapel of the Martyrs. This remains the most plausible hypothesis. I suggest that the interpretation of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic as a rather abstract combination of architectural features better suits modern observers. The following section evaluates the validity of previous comparanda introduced by Gauckler and Alexander in their study of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic. The first two objects are in keeping with Gauckler's understanding of the image as representing a sanctuary without walls. The third item, a funeral mosaic, was mentioned by Alexander because it depicts a three-bayed arch.

4.3 Comparanda

Gauckler compared the basilica image to a small bronze votive lamp cast in the shape of a basilica, based on its lack of walls and a similarity in subject matter [FIG. 4.7]. Discovered outside Chlef, the lamp was found in a fifth-century Christian crypt, that was dated by the sepulchre's inscription. The openwork lamp represents the internal architectural elements of a basilica comprising a clerestory atop arched colonnades, a semi-circular apse and a small altar topped by a cross inside. At either end of the lamp's gabled roof, rings allow its

[245] Alexander 1958, 62

suspension for use. It is fitted all around with ten thin, dolphin-shaped branches that held rings in which to place glass cups for oil. The small size of the lamp (34 x 26 x 17cm) and its intricate detail suggest that it was created for an intimate space. Larger, more luxurious silver examples of "dolphin" lamps were recorded as donations in the *Liber Pontificalis*, under popes Silvester (314-355) and Hilarius (461-468). These lamps were associated with specific contexts, many mentioned in direct relationship with altars or baptistery fittings, for example:

> Basilicam Constantinianam, ubi posuit ista dona: (…) coronas III ex auro purissimo cum delfinos XX, pens. sing. Lib. XV[246]
>
> Constantine's basilica, these are your gifts: (…) three lamps of the purest gold with twenty dolphins, of fifteen pounds each.

These gifts would have been placed near the altar, or were possibly destined for use in the vaulted apse of the basilica. The Basilewksy lamp is not of the large scale noted above. Further, the context of its discovery, its material and size logically point to the development of another group of portable Christian object, known as reliquaries, which developed as part of the martyr cult and became increasingly ornate and jewelled. Nevertheless, Gauckler considered the mosaic and lamp as openwork representations, mere sketches that captured the essential elements of the Christian basilica, without referring to one building in particular.[247]

The other artefact that Gauckler mentioned in a footnote is a small, silver casket known as the Capsella Africana [FIG. 4.8]. This embossed reliquary was found in Algeria and is dated to the fifth century, approximately. The image of a young martyr graced its lid, but Gauckler focused on this object because of the items represented on its rounded ends. Openwork kiosks, flanked by palms, are depicted at either end of the oblong casket where a procession of lambs emerges from these edifices [FIG. 4.9].[248] These openwork structures,

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[246] Davis, 2000
[247] Gauckler 1906, 196
[248] "…les disposition d'une mosaïque absidale. (…) et sortant de deux édicules opposés qui représentent Jérusalem et Bethléem (sic). Or ces deux édicules ont l'un et l'autre la forme de kiosques ajourés." Gauckler 1906, 197

identified as Bethlehem and Jerusalem, reminded Gauckler of the *Ecclesia Mater* image on account of their lack of walls.

Gates and towers flanked by palm trees also decorate another silver casket, the so-called Capsella di Brivio [FIG. 4.10]. In early Christian art, gates or cities with palm trees were sometimes identified as Bethlehem and Jerusalem: this imagery might include a procession of lambs and in some instances, the cities are named in an inscription. From the fifth century, depictions of the cities are decorated with gemstones. Although there are no processions of lambs, no inscriptions or ornamentation on the di Brivio casket, the strong symbolic character suggests the use of an eschatological topography, where the gates and structures represented the twin cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem.[249] This imagery appears on either side of the apse in the San Vitale basilica in Ravenna, where the cities are identified by an inscription [FIG. 4.11]. There is no evidence to suggest that the *Ecclesia Mater* basilica represents a city. For Gauckler, the similarities between the lamp and casket, their contemporaneity and the fact that they were found in different areas and contexts implied to him the existence of a specific type of widespread imagery, hitherto unknown.[250] In fact, depictions of basilicas in early Christian art conceivably increased simply because, from the fourth and fifth centuries, basilicas became increasingly identifiable as part of the architectural landscape.[251] Gauckler included the bronze lamp and silver capsella, as part of his analysis of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic because he misinterpreted the mosaic's image; that is, he understood that the mosaic depicted a building without walls: "Ce qui caractérise essentiellement celle-ci, c'est d'être ouverte à tous venants."[252] Consequently, the comparanda he considered were examples of "openwork". Importantly though, because the mosaic represented the Chapel of the Martyrs it was already in, representing the walls was superfluous.

[249] Noga-Banai 2008, 55
[250] Gauckler 1906, 197; Noga-Banai 2008, 82
[251] Krautheimer 1965, Part 2
[252] Gauckler 1906, 196

Alexander compared the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic with another contemporary Christian funeral mosaic, the Reparatus mosaic in Chlef, Algeria. This funeral pavement, located in the apse of a Chlef basilica, depicted a three-bayed arch and commemorated the resting place of Bishop Reparatus. The long epitaph was inscribed within a wreath that occupied the centre of the composition, in the middle of a three-bayed arch supported by two highly stylised columns [FIG. 4.12]. It was the prominence of arches in both mosaics that led Alexander to compare the two tombs. There is a distinct symmetry of decorative pattern, but the mosaics are most similar in their use of *horror vacui*. Every space in the Reparatus mosaic was occupied by vines, birds, and architectural details. Some perceive in this architectural representation a symbolic elevation of the apse in which the burial was located.[253] Although an inscription informed of the Chlef basilica's dedication in 324, recent research supports its foundation some time during the fifth century.[254] The creation of a western "counter-apse" shifted the axial entrance of the basilica to the side of the building, allowing for the Bishop's burial in 475. His elaborately decorated tomb marker bore witness to his standing in the community. This interpretation is further supported by the elaborate epitaph and unique, colourful imagery of the mosaic, which stood out amongst the geometric patterns in the rest of the basilica's pavement [FIG. 4.13]. Although the *Ecclesia Mater* and Reparatus mosaics share a common commemorative function and portray architectural features, the latter is merely the flattened illustration of a three-bayed arch. Consequently, it is difficult to understand how the Reparatus mosaic adds to our understanding of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic.

The comparanda cited by Gauckler and Alexander fail to explain how the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic was understood by contemporary viewers, or shed any light on its contexts of production and reception. The following section presents new information, outside the Christian artistic tradition, which is useful to provide a contemporary production context to the mosaic, before introducing the viewer's perspective and the examples of evolution, in Late Antiquity, of divine representations.

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[253] Baratte 2008, 230
[254] Burns 2014, 132

4.4 An Established Pictorial Tradition

The treatment of space in Roman art, from the first century onwards, is relevant for understanding the treatment of space in the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic. What follows are Roman and Jewish examples from varied contexts, to provide evidence of this practice. This brief analysis does not consider the symbolic aspects of this imagery. A relief from the tomb of the Haterii, dated to the first century, schematically depicts a temple-shaped tomb, where the façade, side and roofline of the building are shown on the same plane [FIG. 4.14]. The tomb was located on the *Via Labicana*. One panel illustrates the more intimate scenes of the atrium of a Roman house, with mourners, garlands of fruit and flowers and four lit torches placed at the corners of the bier. Prominent architectural features such as the roof and columns of the atrium are also shown in a similar, multi-perspective manner as demonstrated in the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic [FIG. 4.15].

The treatment of space in the representation on a panel from the Ara Pietatis [FIG. 4.16] is also relevant to the interpretation of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic. Consistent with the conventions of Roman art this relief, now located in the Ara Pacis museum, features the Temple of Mars Ultor in the background, seen simultaneously in profile and frontal views. The temple is a backdrop to the sacrifice of a bull. This interesting way of representing architecture alluded to the importance accorded to particular public buildings, such as tombs, temples and commemorative monuments.

In her work on North African mosaics, Katherine Dunbabin drew attention to a specific Carthaginian mosaic depicting a race with four *quadrigae*, dated to the second or third century [FIG. 4.17].[255] This image combines three different viewpoints of a Roman circus in one plane: a view from above, a view of the front of the circus as well as a view of one side of its interior. Dunbabin categorized this image as narrative or illustrative, and suggested that the artist's decision to depict the building in this multi-perspective manner is surprisingly

[255] Dunbabin 1978, 89

common in mosaic pavements showing circus races, across the Mediterranean.[256] The presence of figures and horses in the circus mosaic focuses the viewer's attention on the race's action. However, the public nature of such images differs from the commemorative and religious aspects of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic. Further, the lack of figural representations in the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic and the prominence of the architecture it displays are in stark contrast to circus imagery. Even so, the manner in which the architectural space it treated in both mosaics is similar and familiar to both audiences.

Scholars have failed to appreciate the similarities in the treatment of architecture found on several architectural North African domestic mosaics and the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic.[257] The parallels between these tableaux and the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic do not end with the multi-perspective representations and prominence of the buildings depicted. A deeper investigation of these images reveals how they were understood by viewers, and the intention behind their production. One example that displays the North African penchant for realistic and natural scenes of everyday rural life is Carthage's Dominus Iulius mosaic. Dated to the late fourth century, the mosaic is dominated by the image of a rich landowner's estate and also illustrates the activities, and bounty, of successful rural life [FIG. 4.18].[258] The manner in which the gate, doors, turrets, colonnaded galleries and domes of the estate are portrayed use the same multi-perspective treatment as the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic, and represent all perspectives on the same pictorial field. Although the buildings at the centre of the mosaic do not replicate the estate in exact detail, there are sufficient individual details "which suggests that it is just not a stock type magnified to fill a position of unaccustomed importance, but that its main features are based on life."[259] In other words, the illustration represents a real estate. Various seasonal activities associated with the farm and its holdings are pictured around the villa. The owner and his wife are represented with produce and luxury items by clothed attendants and are shown as actively involved in overseeing the activities, and reaping the benefits, of this rural North African domain. Representing such bounty may

[256] Dunbabin 1978, 90
[257] Gauckler 1906,189
[258] Dunbabin 1999, 118-9
[259] Dunbabin 1999, 120

have been considered a way to ensure continued prosperity.[260] The mosaic itself conveyed pride, wealth, and established the owners' standing in the community, and perhaps served as a reminder to the viewer of the source of prosperity and luxury they enjoyed from their hosts.[261] The central position and large size of the estate depicted in the Dominus Iulius mosaic drew attention to its importance, and the patron or artist chose to introduce rural scenes to reflect on the abundance of the Seasons as well as the wealth of the owners.

Three other mosaics, discovered in the apses of a Tabarka villa, also feature architectural depictions with similarly combined viewpoints [FIG 4.4]. Each mosaic illustrates the building group of the villa slightly differently, in careful detail and using a multi-perspective treatment. The large villa is placed the middle of each mosaic and it occupies different rural settings, amongst trees, vines, birds and domesticated animals. These three mosaics are described as "the three traditional parts of a rural establishment: the *villa urbana*, the *villa rustica* and the *fructaria*."[262] These apse mosaics were a reiteration of the real domain where they were located, and celebrated its grandeur and riches. The three depictions of the same villa were unconventional and location-specific, and they presented their many architectural perspectives to the viewer in a single plane. The analyses of both domestic examples introduce a strong attachment to the land and to the villas that are portrayed. The manner in which these buildings are shown indicates their reality and importance, but it also conveys pride to the viewer, In a similar fashion, the prominence and rambling style of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic.

The practice of illustrating a building using several points of view is also present in Jewish art. For example, it appears on the frescoes in the Dura Europos synagogue, dated to 244 [FIG. 4.19]. The scene illustrates Aaron consecrating the Jerusalem Temple. The Temple is depicted in multiple perspectives, on one plane. The bottom of the image shows a wall with three doors; the menorah, altar and a sacrifice are shown above and finally, the building is shown on top in its entirety, in a cutaway fashion to highlight the presence of the Ark of

[260] Dunbabin 1978, 120
[261] Dunbabin 1978, 120
[262] Dunbabin 1978, 122

the Covenant inside. The cross-section is evident because the pediment's right column is deliberately missing. This is not a mistake, as the *acroteria angularia* and the remainder of the pediment are shown in their entirety. Here, the illustration includes walls because the Temple depicted is not a reiteration of the Dura synagogue that contained the fresco. This differs from the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic, which depicts the Chapel of the Martyrs in which it was located, hence there was no need to illustrate walls. The purpose of the Dura fresco was narrative, and although it was included in a place of worship, its function is not a sepulchral one.

Summary

The examples of Roman architectural depictions that employ a multi-perspective, rambling style were found in public, religious and domestic settings. They provide evidence that this treatment of space was widespread from the first century across the Mediterranean, at the time of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic. Although their representations are not exact, these images provide sufficient details to be recognised as real buildings, and in some cases, they represented the building in which they were found. Therefore, one can conclude that such multi-faceted depictions of buildings were commonplace enough for the viewers of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaics to understand that the mosaic referred to an actual building. The following section defines the mosaic's viewer and attempts to shape the context of its reception.

4.5 The Viewer's Perspective

Focusing now on the viewership of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic, one must identify the viewer and the circumstances under which the mosaic was seen. Only baptised Christians accessed the basilica and participated in rituals and liturgy. Neophytes may have accessed sections of the basilica, but they would not have been allowed to participate during worship in the nave. The tomb cover fulfilled its main purpose of keeping the memory of Valentia alive within the community, offering contemporary viewers a link to their most immediate past, as the location of the mosaic made the image easily accessible during services.

Bénet's initial observation about the mosaic, as a viewer in *situ,* remains the most astute description about the subject matter and viewership. Noting the position of the mosaic within the pavement and its image, he correctly recognized that the mosaic's basilica was the Chapel of the Martyrs, just as a modern "You are here" map would indicate to a modern viewer. Because the viewer is already in the building looking at the mosaic, the need to depict walls in the mosaic was unnecessary. The artisan captured in his design elements of the basilica as the viewer saw them. The position and orientation of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic within the Chapel of the Martyrs remain crucial to its comprehension: from the left, close to the apse and facing the middle of the church. A viewer would only have to lift his or her head to appreciate the layout of the actual church depicted on the tomb cover. There is also an important symbolic aspect to this image that has yet to be discussed. The architectural image dominates the mosaic. leaving little room for an epitaph naming the deceased. The deceased becomes enveloped by the building, as is the viewer, in life. The *Ecclesia Mater* image not only contains the deceased, through the position of the epitaph, but the basilica also refers to the practice of depicting divine spaces.

The *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic was indebted to a long tradition of depicting sacred spaces and sanctuaries. In a 2003 article, Sabine MacCormack discusses changing perceptions of holy places in Late Antiquity highlighted in written and material evidence. After establishing strong visual parallels between temples and tombs, MacCormack uses coinage in her demonstration to further explain the visual part of her argument for continuity and rupture in depictions of sacred spaces. First, a Roman coin from Diocletian shows a sacrifice performed in front of a temple that contains the image of a deity. MacCormack then draws attention to a Bar Kochba coin: because the Jewish God cannot be captured in an image, and because he is not in one place, this tradition introduced symbolism where the Jewish God is embodied by the Ark of the Covenant resting in the Temple of Jerusalem. Lastly, she cites a Constantinian coin, produced after the Emperor's reported vision in 312, showing a sacrifice carried out in front of an empty temple. Indeed, there are more subtle theological ideas and discourses at play here between these religions that reflect how these traditions articulated their ideas of sanctity, yet MacCormack successfully argues a re-negotiation of sacred space, where buildings were understood as sacred even when their depiction does not

include a deity inhabiting their space.[263] This brief article explains how viewers were already familiar with various modes of representing sacred spaces through the use of symbols or pictorial conventions, without deities. This understanding of sacred space, well established by the fifth century, is important as it reaffirms how viewers of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic understood the sanctity of the image. Because Christian churches defined the boundary of sacred space and of the community, so the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic included Valentia in the sanctuary in visual terms, through the position of her epitaph.[264] Symbolically, the epitaph indicates how her congregation, her local mother Church, embraced her in death too, as discussed in the next section. Interestingly, the illustration on the *Ecclesia Mater* tomb provides the perfect fusion of sepulchre and temple mentioned by MacCormack: "(…) like the dead, so the gods were visualised as inhabiting (sitting or standing) in their temple (…) Nonetheless, temples and tombs shared certain features because both usually consisted of a holy area, marked by a building and surrounded by an enclosure."[265]

4.6 The Epitaph

The presence of the epitaph is useful in identifying the deceased, Valentia, yet its enigmatic formula has led to confusion in the interpretation of both the image and the expression. "ECCLESIA MATER - VALENTIA IN PACAE" first identifies the deceased, Valentia, and defines the image itself as the "mother church". It is unclear whether the epitaph addressed the deceased or the community, but its commemorative formula "in pacae" intimated that Valentia was to rest in peace within the building (church) and the local congregation (Church). The epitaph did not invite prayer, nor did it record a patron or contain a dedicatory phrase; rather the wording was succinct and evocative. As Latin was quickly evolving phonetically during Late Antiquity, the more common formula "in pace", "in peace", could well have been wrongly transcribed as "in pacae".

[263] MacCormack 2003, 264
[264] Yasin 2009, 194
[265] MacCormack 2003, 258

Scholars have stated that the expression "*Ecclesia Mater*" referred to the Church [of Rome], implying the Holy See.[266] This interpretation is straightforward for modern viewers, yet it sets aside a more complex, personal reading of the expression and its contemporary connotation. As Christians defined themselves through their relationship with God and their congregation, the specific reference to the "*Ecclesia Mater"* emphasized or articulated a more personal relationship between the deceased, the community and God. Similarly, the mosaic basilica mirrored, a spiritual and sacred space where Valentia's soul was at rest. In this burial, not only was Valentia entombed within the church walls physically, her name was inscribed within the church in the tomb mosaic as well. The artisan, or patron, could have chosen to have the epitaph at the bottom of the mosaic, outside the sanctuary of the mosaic basilica, but instead they redefined the new relationship between Christian, Church and Community by placing it inside. From this we can infer that Valentia was a valued member of her Church in life, and in death both the spiritual aspect of this Church, and the church itself, welcomed her.

Early Christian writers contributed to the framework, vocabulary and ritual of the Church, so it is relevant to discuss their use of the expression "*Ecclesia Mater*". What follows is a brief overview and commentary on the usage of the expression by Tertullian and Cyprian. Of course, we have no direct evidence to verify whether or not Valentia or her congregation were familiar with specific texts. Nevertheless, we are aware that ideas were widely circulated at the time in sermons and readings, across the Mediterranean. Yet despite the apparent popularity of the expression, its use in an epitaph remains unique to the Chapel of the Martyr's mosaic.

The earliest recorded use of the expression "*Ecclesia Mater"* occurred in a letter recounting the harrowing details of martyrs in Lyons and Vienne, dated 177-8. Recorded by Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History, the Epistles of the Gallican Church was intended for Asian Churches.[267] This text established a clear link between the motherly functions of the

[266] As implied by Gauckler 1906, 197; Alexander 1958, 63
[267] Eusebius *Hist. Eccl*. 5.1.10

Church (as a community) tending to the faithful and how these characteristics were displayed in times of persecution and martyrdom, on a local level and in practical terms. These caring functions, associated with women and more specifically with motherhood, reassuringly mentioned in such dire circumstance provided comfort and familiarity to Christians facing persecution and despair. In such a context, this missive served both as information and inspiration. And naturally, expressions capturing the motherly attributes of the Church were, and remain, appealing images.

Patristic writers chose to use the expression *"Ecclesia Mater"* exclusively in their non-apologetic texts. This usage, in such a context, may have contributed to reinforcing the audience's identification as children in Christ. The association with motherhood appears somewhat at odds with, or perhaps denotes the natural evolution of, the earliest identification of the Church as the Virgin Bride of Christ. However, introducing the concept of the Church as mother allowed early Christian writers to link this new Church with the Old Testament.[268] The key to interpreting such early Christian literary imagery was eschatological: it lay with the understanding of the end times, when salvation was ushered in through the Messiah — an idea closer at hand to some who were facing persecution. Womanhood evoked the pastoral function and social activities of the Church, and such feminine roles were widely explored by Early Christian writers. Delahaye summarised Paul's approach to the Church, in the New Testament, as threefold: it remained a virgin in guarding the pure doctrine, it became a bride in its devotion to Christ and acted as a mother to the Christian faithful, its children in the Spirit.[269] The texts of Tertullian and Cyprian provide a very North African point of view to the *Ecclesia Mater* concept.[270]

[268] So closely, in fact, that Origen considered the Church as pre-existing its earthly foundation. Plumpe 1943, 69
[269] Delahaye 1964, 62
[270] Plumpe 1943, 125-126

Tertullian (150-240)

Tertullian's Latin text referred to the Church as "mother" in both his Catholic and Montanist writings. As with other patristic texts, the epithet "mother" was not found in his apologetic works but appeared where the pastoral care of the faithful was of primary concern. This more intimate portrayal of the Church filled a need within the community and reflected on the actions of local congregations. Tertullian's approach associated the Church with the nurturing aspect of motherhood, which was so important to the faithful when confronted with the harsh reality of living their faith and possibly enduring martyrdom. It was a powerful image to grasp in times of crisis and one easy to reflect on and contemplate. Tertullian refers to the Church as "*Domina Mater Ecclesia"*, who sees to the martyrs' spiritual needs in harsh times.[271] I disagree here with Plumpe's insistence that Tertullian "by habit or even unconsciously — speaks of the universal Church, the greatest Mater Ecclesia of all. Under similar circumstances we do the same today", and therein lies the projection in his analysis.[272] The following excerpt demonstrates a catechetical explanation of why the image of the mother evoked the Church's caring ministrations in times of persecution. It is unequivocal in establishing a strict comparison between Church and mother: "Ne *mater* quidem *ecclesia* praetiritur. Siquidem in filio et patre mater recognoscitur, de qua constat et patris et filii nomen." "Even our mother the Church is not omitted, seeing that in 'son' and 'father' there is a recognition of 'mother': for the name of both father and son has its actuality from her."[273]

Cyprian (200-258)

Cyprian's writings demonstrate a similar approach, where his main goal was to comfort the faithful. These writings coincided with times of great hardship for his community, during the third century Decian persecutions, for example. He specifically portrayed the *Ecclesia Mater* as being "of the people" and referred to the Church as Mother at least 30 times within his texts on the unity of the church, but not explicitly using the

[271] Tertullian *Mart.* 1
[272] Plumpe 1943, 48-49
[273] Tertullian *Or.* 2

"*Ecclesia Mater"* expression.[274] Cyprian only used this expression once when referring to the Catholic Church and it is understood that this distinction was necessary to avoid confusion with any number of heresies of the time: "ut ad *matrem* suam, id est, *ecclesiam* catholicam, revertantur" "they return to their mother, that is, the Catholic Church."[275]

Summary

These early Christian texts indicate how the expression *"Ecclesia Mater"* was used to draw attention to the motherly aspects of the congregation, by referring to the actions posed in response to persecutions, for example. Still, the meaning of the expression is not clear. Importantly, early Christians' understanding of the Church as "mother" differed from our modern view that the Mother Church is that of Rome, the Holy See; the primacy of the Roman Church had yet to be resolved in the fifth century. Although there are records showing active correspondence between churches across the Mediterranean and the bishop of Rome, popes of the fourth and fifth centuries did not use the expression "*Ecclesia Mater*" to describe the Church of Rome.[276] Moreover, the dedicatory mosaic at Santa Sabina basilica in Rome, thought to be the earliest inscription to recognize, or hint at, the primacy of Rome and its bishop over other Church centres, dates from the fifth century [FIG. 4.20]. If the expression "*Ecclesia Mater*" did not find favour in Rome very early, then it is a mistake to think that the concept of Mother Church, as we understand it now, was fully developed and widely used when Valentia's tomb was built.

With this in mind, we must rely upon the immediate context of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic to provide the best interpretation of the expression it displays, even if one allows that the congregation was exposed to broader ideas. This context, and the image itself, still supports a multivalence of interpretations, as each personal experience of the tomb cover cannot be set aside. Even if, by the fifth century, persecutions had dwindled, martyrdom and martyr cults remained very important, across North Africa especially. Although it is

[274] Plumpe 1943, 125
[275] Plumpe 1943, 94-95
[276] Plumpe 1943, 126-127

impossible to determine with the evidence at hand whether Valentia ministered to her congregation in times of strife, we can still infer from the mosaic and its position in the Chapel that she was an important and perhaps influential member of her community. Consequently, it becomes difficult to defend the interpretation that the building in the mosaic represented the Roman Church as it is thought of now, as inferred by Gauckler and explained by subsequent scholars.[277] Moreover, explaining the epitaph as representing the abstract concept to the local congregation or local Church, supports my interpretation that the mosaic depicts the Chapel of the Martyrs. The choice of the epitaph alongside the image indicates how important it was to remember Valentia as a member of the community as well as an individual. The mosaic's visual and spatial impact impressed upon viewers the importance of the person commemorated, as well as her link with the church, both spiritually (the local Church) and literally (church).

In the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic, we witness a literal and particularly unique way of commemorating the deceased through the community, by depicting the Chapel of the Martyrs building and enclosing Valentia's epitaph within it. Although the basilica depicted on the tomb cover illustrates a typical North African church, the multiplicity of meanings derived from this image, the epitaph and its context strengthens this discussion. The use of the expression "*Ecclesia Mater"* served as a reminder to the viewer that perhaps the deceased played a nurturing and motherly role within the community. Similarly, the congregation extended its motherly care and attention to Valentia. It is misreading the epitaph to associate it with the later concept of the Mother Church of Rome, or Holy See, as we know it today. Having provided information about the epitaph, the penultimate section of this chapter considers aspects of the mosaic's patronage.

The mosaic gives no easy clues regarding its patronage: there are no donor inscriptions, for example. In spite of this, one must concede that the artisan or patron responsible for the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic made a deliberate choice to commemorate Valentia the way they did, using an image that is the re-iteration of the Chapel of the Martyrs.

[277] Gauckler 1906, 197

Moreover, the artist or person designing this unique mosaic needed access to the basilica, more precisely to the exact location of Valentia's tomb, in order to visualize the mosaic's composition and orientation. There is little information about patronage in North Africa during the first centuries of Christianity, but one can safely assume that, especially in this case, the local approved of the mosaic's image and location. For obvious reasons, the impact and meaning of the image would have been different if it were placed anywhere else in the pavement. No further information is available about patronage with regards to the Ecclesia Mater mosaic, but a careful and similar review of other mosaics in the pavement could yield new insight into this topic.

4.7 Conclusion

The *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic illustrates the Chapel of the Martyrs, despite not recreating every detail of the building faithfully. Its uniqueness does not reside in the way the basilica is depicted, as I have shown how this multi-perspective treatment of space was common and spread across many pictorial traditions and contexts. Rather, its Christian funereal context and its unique employ of the expression *Ecclesia Mater* make it one-of-a-kind. Early scholarship had set aside the contemporary context of reception, along with the viewer's position, and provided interpretations based on presentism not contemporary to the mosaic's design and production. The position of the viewer, as well as the placement of the mosaic within the Chapel of the Martyrs, were key to its interpretation and understanding. Of course, the image still depicts an "average" North African basilica, but as Bénet first observed, the mosaic's image depicted the basilica in which it was laid. This tomb placed Valentia under the protection of her Church and congregation in spiritual terms and, similarly, her remains were protected within the building, under the pavement. What is more, the location of her burial within the church pavement allowed the community to actively participate in keeping her memory alive. Her strong affiliation to the local community was affirmed by the image of the Chapel of the Martyrs on her tomb, indicating an intimate relationship and a sense of belonging to a new family, through God. There were certainly simpler visual ways to commemorate the deceased, as an *orant* for example. The choice to lay the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic in the Chapel of Martyrs was deliberate, as was the depiction of a basilica and elusive choice of epitaph: this very literal, brick and mortar representation of a

basilica commits not only Valentia to memory, but also her local congregation, her local mother Church, her *Ecclesia Mater*.

The next chapter will explore another important theme in North African early Christianity, and further define relationships between the deceased, their congregations and God, more specifically through the optics of martyrdom and sainthood. The epitaph and imagery on deacon Crescentinus' mosaics provide an opportunity to challenge the previous assumptions that Crescentinus died as a martyr or a saint.

5: The Mosaic of Crescentinus

Scholars agree overall that Christian burials were first included within church walls as a means for the congregation to share in the power of martyrdom.[278] In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul transferred healing powers to objects that he touched, through the miracles he performed in the name of Jesus.[279] Paul accomplished his miracles whilst alive, but martyrs were recognized as gaining their power by giving up their life. They endured torture and died for their faith and thus emulated Christ's ultimate offering. Christian communities took special care of martyrs' bodies early on and continued to do so throughout the persecutions. These bodies were potent, and being buried in proximity to them was thought to extend grace to the deceased. Communities gathered to pray and worship in basilicas, so this was the ideal location to also remember the dead. The belief that the body and blood of martyrs were imbued and redeemed people laid to rest in proximity to them was already established in the fourth century, as evidenced by the eulogy Saint Ambrose delivered about his brother in *De Excessu*.[280] The creation and continued re-telling of this after-life narrative rested with its verbal and pictorial representations, at least in this context. Stories of martyrdom were inspiring to the congregation, and the courage and heroism that martyrs demonstrated were held up as examples to follow.

Church spaces were transformed through their ability to make contact with God through prayer and the reading out of martyr stories. This power was magnified through the immediacy of martyr bodies.[281] Including tombs within church spaces allowed worshippers a connection with their past history in a very tangible and visible manner — a manner similar to that of Roman emperors. The images and dedications found on these tombs show evidence of careful thought, where patrons chose and designed a message especially for the

[278] Mackie 1995, 91; Yasin 2009, 21
[279] ACT 19: 11-13
[280] Mackie 2003, 128
[281] Yasin 2011, 244

deceased and their Christian community. For the venerated few, the martyrs and the Saints, not only did these decorated tomb covers remind the congregation of their sacrifice, but in some cases inscriptions also prompted the community to call upon those blessed by God to intercede with God on their behalf.

This chapter examines deacon Crescentinus' mosaic located, along with the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic, in the Chapel of the Martyrs at Tabarka [FIG 4.3]. Although examples of antecedents and comparanda for this mosaic have been briefly noted in past scholarship, the contemporary meaning of the imagery and the epitaph has not been adequately examined. The discussion herein introduces new information using early Christian martyr imagery, as well as scenes of apotheosis borrowed from Roman and Jewish pictorial traditions, amongst others. A newly proposed translation of the epitaph further refines the meaning of the iconography of the upper mosaic panel. The dedication not only identified the deacon's grave, it also recognized his continuing obligations toward the congregation in the after-life. These duties defined the patron's, and by extension the community's, expectations and hopes through the creation of a collective memory. The replacement here of both image and dedication within a contemporary context clarifies not only how Tabarka Christians conceptualised the deacon's afterlife specifically, but also defined the views of the patron and the congregation. The present analysis of this tomb cover determines how the mosaic informs the viewer that the deacon did not die a martyr, but instead was venerated as one by his congregation for having led an exemplary life. In order to appreciate how viewers might have understood the imagery, it is important to consider the choices that the patron and artisan made in selecting the specific imagery to illustrate Crescentinus' afterlife. This imagery borrowed from a rich artistic history that was influenced by public, private and religious art.

5.1 Description

The mosaic tomb cover measures 1.9m x 0.95m and there is damage along its left side [FIG 5.1]. It is defined by an elaborate border of denticles that are rendered in cream and brown shades, to convey a three-dimensional effect. The cover itself is divided into three

panels. The slightly larger middle panel contains the epitaph, which is discussed later in section 5.4. The upper panel shows three horsemen, prancing amongst birds and flowers on a light background, with their horses clearly harnessed [FIG 5.2].[282] Two horsemen face each other at the top of the mosaic. The top left rider's upper body and head are missing, but we can see that his hands are placed by the reins of his horse. The horseman on the right wears a ray crown on his head, and because their arrangement suggests a heraldic pairing, we can infer that the position of their hands and the type of headgear they wore almost certainly mirrored each other. A right hand descends between the two of them from a darker blue-green coloured glass band at the top of the panel and holds out a ribboned green and red wreath to the third horseman below. A red ribbon extends from either side of the wreath. The third horseman does not appear to wear a ray crown as his hair, in contrast to the other figure, flows freely behind his head, and instead of holding his reigns, his hands reach out in front of him above his head to grasp at the ribboned wreath. This middle horseman, representing the deceased, wears a dalmatic (a liturgical vestment commonly worn by deacons and members of the clergy), the details of which are outlined in darker *tesserae*.[283] Clothing was still important to identify a figure's status at the time, as it had been in Roman art.[284]

The bottom mosaic panel is the narrowest; the images depicted in this part of the mosaic are somewhat unclear and the panel appears to have been more heavily restored. At the right, there is a red Chi-Rho symbol and at least one ship present, notable for its defined prow and with some of its details traced in blue *tesserae* [FIG.5.3]. These images are difficult to identify on the panel. Another image at the left is difficult to interpret: its curve echoes that of the ship's prow but not much more can be concluded. Scholars suggest here the presence of apocalyptic letters (α and ω) and a dolphin in the water by the ship (possibly, the curved object on the left side). The α and ω often accompany the Chi-Rho symbol or the

[282] The horsemen are not, as Jensen suggests, placed in a ring – such placement would show them all facing the same way around an imaginary circle. Burns 2014, 119

[283] The dalmatic is a wide-sleeved tunic used as a liturgical vestment, habitually adorned with stripes (*clavi*).

[284] Clarke 2006, 133; Downs 2007, 2

staurogram in early Christian art, as do dolphins, which also appear alongside fish and other sea creatures, as we have seen in the Demna baptistery [FIG 2.5] Dolphins were also depicted on lamps such as the Basilewsky lamp [FIG 4.7] and other lamps described in the *Liber Pontificalis*, as well as on signet rings where the symbol, associated with anchors, conveyed hope and fortitude.[285] In Roman art, dolphins accompanied Apollo, Poseidon, and Dionysus and were associated with a blessed afterlife. Christians saw in the dolphin an agent of salvation, reflecting the realities once observed by ancient mariners and authors.[286]

5.2 Previous Scholarship

Deacon Crescentinus' mosaic was originally described as an incoherent but rich collection of early Christian symbols. According to Alexander, such unique figural representations were easily identified as products of Tabarka workshops.[287] The upper panel was thought to depict three horsemen in Paradise, rearing up at the sun, with three birds carrying roses and a cross.[288] The "sun" was subsequently identified as an inverted tree, its bushy top visible because it was upside down. Such an interpretation reinforced the broader paradisiacal garden theme already recognized and supported by the presence of birds and roses scattered about.[289] The identification of the *Dextera Dei* descending from heaven and holding a wreath crown was based on Alexander's observations: the yellow-pinkish "tree" was outlined in red, which was a conventional way to depict flesh.[290] In addition, the "tree top" was found to be a vegetal wreath crown tied with ribbon. This explanation drew comparisons with Christian examples, in particular a small silver reliquary that will be discussed below in section 5.3. The wreath crown was identified as the "crown of righteousness" sought by the deceased for having fought the good fight and remaining steadfast in the face of adversity (2 Tim 4: 7-8).

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[285] For examples of dolphins and anchors depicted on signet rings: Spier 2007, items 260-263
[286] Tristan 1996, 91
[287] Alexander classified this mosaic as "Type D" because of its figural components. Alexander 1987, 2
[288] Bénet 1904, 386
[289] Gauckler 1906, 205
[290] Alexander 1987, 3

For Alexander, the mosaic's iconography carried a theme of promised salvation. She insisted that this was reiterated by the epitaph and dolphin safely guiding the ship (marked with α and ω) to Christ (represented by the Chi-Rho) toward the right on the bottom panel.[291] Similarly, Gauckler identified the elements in the bottom panel as Christ, the Church and the Faithful, where the boat represented the Church traveling toward Christ (the α and ω), and the Christians were identified with the dolphin swimming in the ship's wake. In a Christian funerary context, dolphins were usually identified as Christ, a psychopomp who guided or carried souls up to God.[292] Alternately, the dolphin can be interpreted as Christ carrying the Church.[293] Both Alexander's and Gauckler's interpretations differ only slightly, and both are plausible, but limited in their scope: the Chi-Rho symbol does represent Christ, dolphins were common symbols in early Christian imagery and the ship is, in this context, easily associated with the Church. These interpretations are broad, and although salvation is a recurring theme in early Christian art, this mosaic is actually much more personalised and informative. The overarching message is designed for an audience who knew the deacon, or at least learned of him through their worship. Although the underlying message may be salvific, by the fifth century, aspects of Christian iconography had become more triumphal. In this case the triumph over death allowed the viewer a glimpse of a blessed afterlife. Alexander argued that the layout of the mosaic echoed Jewish and Christian floor mosaics, which tended to place the heavens, the earth and the sea in a logical fashion — an organisation of realms also reflected in the images depicted in the Demna baptism font mosaic, incidentally.

The depiction of horses on Crescentinus' mosaic also drew comparisons with hunting scenes, a popular subject illustrated in private North African mosaics.[294] Gauckler suggested that Crescentinus had possibly suffered for his faith and died surrounded by a "whiff of sanctity".[295] For Jensen, this late fourth- or early fifth-century tomb mosaic

[291] Alexander 1987, 4
[292] Tristan 1996, 91
[293] Tristan 1996, 159
[294] Alexander 1987, 3
[295] Gauckler 1906, 204

suggested that the deacon won his race and claimed his crown, possibly martyred at the hands of Vandal persecutions.[296] In point of fact, the tomb cover offers no evidence that the deacon was martyred. Parallels drawn with biblical verses such as I Cor. 9: 24-27 and Patristic writings also provide a plausible basis for the tomb cover image in general.[297] Yet this documentary evidence merely reflected prevailing early Christian themes. The tomb cover not only identifies Crescentinus' status, in life and in death, it focuses especially on his role after death, as an intermediate between God and his congregation. God honours the deceased, Crescentinus, by extending a crown to him as a reward for his devout life, but not necessarily for sacrificing his life. His companions, the two other horsemen who are themselves angels or martyrs, witness this event. The crown, then, is an important symbol that merits more attention. The following discussion focuses also on the symbolism of the *Dextera Dei* or *Manus Dei*, establishes parallels with depictions of apotheosis and explores the contemporary imagery of martyrdom and sainthood, as new aspects of the imagery of the Deacon's mosaic.

5.3 Antecedents

One small corpus of images, the hand of Sabazius, has not been included thus far in the discussion about the *Dextera Dei*. These small ornate bronze hands were votive works made to honour the god Sabazius, assimilated with Dionysus and then Zeus Sabazius [FIG 5.4]. This deity had a long history of worship and was adopted by Romans, who produced the hands during the first and second centuries. These hands included, in various configurations, the many attributes of the god, such as pine cones, snakes, frogs, rams' heads, thyrsoi, whips, mother and child, among others. The position of the fingers in these hands is reminiscent of, and roughly contemporary with, the Christian *benedicto Latina* gesture insofar as the right hand is used with its thumb and first two fingers extended, and the third and fourth fingers bent down toward the palm of the hand. In fact, this comparison was an easy and instantly recognizable way for scholars to describe this pagan gesture. There is

[296] Hellholm 2011, 1683
[297] Jensen n.d.

nothing to link the hands of Sabazius imagery to the Christian *Dextera Dei* representations directly; nevertheless, its iconography was a part of the rich material imagery of Christianity.

Early Christian iconography also borrowed from early Jewish representational art, found mainly in places of worship.[298] In the context of Jewish figurative art, the image of the *Dextera Dei* developed from the end of the second century. The *Dextera Dei,* typically shown as the right hand, is a Hebrew anthropomorphic representation that indicated an intervention or a punishment by the Old Testament God.[299] Examples appear several times in the third-century Dura Europos synagogue frescoes [FIG 5.5]. The hand was also included in later, more elaborate and narrative synagogue pavement mosaics, which developed between the fourth and seventh centuries. It is thought that these Jewish paintings and pavements were not considered as "graven images" proscribed by the second commandment.[300] Neither could such images be sacred, as mosaic pavements, for example, were trodden upon. Further, motifs illustrated on the synagogue walls were stripped of any idolatrous dimension and instead became more repetitive, formulaic and ornamental.[301] Representations of the *Dextera Dei* became associated with particular scenes such as the Binding of Isaac (the Akedah), as depicted on the mosaic pavement of the synagogues at Sepphoris (fifth century), where the image of the Hand has not been preserved, and Beth'Alpha (sixth century), where it emerges from the heavens surrounded by cloud shapes [FIG 5.6].[302] In a departure from biblical writings, these images of the Akedah illustrated the *Dextera Dei* in place of the Angel of God. Such variations may have developed "out of rabbinical exegesis, stressing God's interventions in human affairs."[303] In Jewish tradition, the *Dextera Dei* was not representative of the whole deity but rather indicated divine intervention at key moments of the narrative.

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[298] Anderson, 1997
[299] MacIsaac 1975, 323
[300] Ex 20: 4-6 KJV
[301] Insoll 1999, 59
[302] Hachlili 2009, 20-21
[303] Hachlili 2009, 61

In addition to the *Dextera Dei,* the Beth'Alpha synagogue also contains a depiction of the sun wearing a ray crown in his *quadriga,* a motif further discussed below [FIG 5.7].[304]

The round wreath, worn on the head, was a well-established ancient symbol. In Greek tradition, the wreath was a prize attained through physical victory, whereas the Romans came to associate it, although not exclusively, with power in government. Various materials were used to make wreaths, and these public honours were presented according to specific rules and ceremonies. Victory crowning the emperor (with a laurel wreath) is a common image in Roman art, where such imagery implied the divine recognition of imperial conquest. As well as being a metaphor for victory, the wreath was a sign of authority extended by the gods, and such images verged on the sacred.[305] In the late second century, Septimius Severus (193-211) declared himself the son of the deified emperor Marcus Aurelius. He reinforced this claim visually through the use of portraiture on coinage and paintings where he wears a wreath. Severus' image on the painted *tondo* from the Fayum (200) clearly depicts the emperor and his son Caracalla wearing gold wreaths decorated with gems [FIG. 5.8]. This pictorial statement demonstrated that the emperor already possessed a divine right to rule that was symbolised by the wreath on his head. Roman emperors carefully chose their visual representations to suit their needs and support a particular message: "in Roman art, a "portrait" is rarely a "likeness'.[306] Wreaths and garlands were also elements of Roman funerals and were part of funeral depictions, such as represented on the Haterii tomb relief [FIG. 4.15]. Greeks were first to crown their dead with leaves and flowers, but wreaths and garlands were laid on biers during Roman funeral processions.[307] Golden laurel crowns were painted on Roman Egyptian Fayum portraits, very much in keeping with the Eastern fashion of representing the deceased in all their jewellery. These life-like Fayum pictures were painted on sarcophagi and date mostly from the second and third centuries [FIG 5.9].

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[304] This image brings to mind Elijah's ascent to God (2 Kings 2:11), an apotheosis where Elijah is taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot pulled by four horses.
[305] For more on this topic, MacIsaac 1975, 324
[306] Kleiner 2007, 292
[307] Euripides *Phoenissae.* 1647

Horses were a common subject in Roman art: they are notably represented in pastoral and hunting scenes [FIG 4.18] as well as in more public circus and military depictions. The subject of the Roman chariot race and its associated imagery was meant to celebrate victories and incite supporters' enthusiasm. Mosaics depicted horses and race winners carrying wreaths and palms [FIG 5.10].[308] Another Roman antecedent for the horses in the deacon's mosaic is found in a military context, the *decursio*, the best illustration of which is on the base of the Antonine column (161 CE). On two sides of the base, in a strong show of military pageantry, the cavalry forms a circle around standing soldiers [FIG 5.11]. On another panel, the emperor is seen ascending to heaven with his wife, alongside eagles, which are thought to represent Antoninus and Faustina's souls [FIG 5.12]. This representation of imperial apotheosis is another way of demonstrating divine support for the imperial family, but also the divine status of the emperor in death. The *decursio* and the apotheosis indicated the special status of the deceased emperors, who were even buried within city limits. Scenes of apotheosis and *decursiones* illustrated this ascent into the heavens to show that those who were taken up to the heavens in this manner became divine and immortal.

5.4 Comparanda

The imagery of the *Dextera Dei* first appeared in a Christian context in the Via Latina catacomb in Rome during the fourth century [FIG 5.13]. The gesture easily captured the presence or intervention of God and was used on sarcophagi, for example on that of Junius Bassus and on lamps, ivory, silver and glass objects and in church mosaics [FIG 5.14].[309] These iterations of the *Dextera Dei* were initially associated with Old Testament stories such as the binding of Isaac and Moses and the burning bush. While the *Dextera Dei* represented an intervention in both religious traditions, Jewish depictions show the Hand as much larger, proportionally, than the figures in the scenes, possibly to indicate the differences between humans and God. In Christian depictions, the Hand usually appears emerging from a small or large cloud, or from the sky above the scene. It has been suggested that these differences

[308] Dunbabin 1999, 88
[309] For more on these objects, Insoll 1999.

between Jewish and early Christian depictions of the Hand better serve one or the other theology, but this argument remains difficult to substantiate.[310] In a Christian context, the *Dextera Dei* eventually became closely associated with martyrdom iconography, and this is exemplified by the inclusion of a wreath crown.

Even though early Christian writers rejected the traditional use of the Roman mortuary crown, which they associated with pagan idolatry, wreaths were commonly depicted in early Christian funeral iconography.[311] These images, carved on Christian sarcophagi dating from the third and fourth centuries, were usually accompanied by other symbols such as the cross, the lamb, and the Chi-Rho or the staurogram [FIG 5.15].[312] In one example, a wreath appears over the various scenes of Christ's passion and Christ is finally crowned with this laurel wreath of victory instead of with the expected crown of thorns [FIG 5.16].[313] This wreath transforms the cross from an instrument of torture and death to one of resurrection, victory and triumph over death. Wreaths are also depicted in the Felix basilica mosaic tomb covers in Demna [FIG 5.17]. The symbol was sometimes placed at the top of the tomb marker, over the deceased's head, and a Chi-Rho symbol or short epitaph was inscribed within the wreath. Victory, long symbolised by the wreath, extended to include a spiritual triumph over death through attaining the afterlife.

In a baptismal context, the meaning of the wreath varied slightly — though the triumphal aspects remained, crowns also conveyed an eschatological meaning here. Crowns carried by the apostles were depicted in the domes of the Neonian and Aryan baptisteries in Ravenna [FIG 2.20-2.23]. A neophyte undergoing baptism in the first instance would be reborn as a Christian, but upon death would be resurrected in Christ. This latter aspect of

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[310] Insoll 1999, 69
[311] Tertullian and Clements of Alexandria, notably. Markham 2014
[312] The symbol, a superimposition of Tau (T) and Rho (P), represented Jesus on the cross.
[313] As recorded in the Gospels, where Jesus wore a crowns of thorns during his Passion: Mat 27: 29; Mark 15: 17; John 19: 2-5

Christianity was emphasized in this context by the presence of a *hetoimasia,* a throne prepared for God's second coming [FIG 2.19-2.24]. The crown is a frequent symbol in other Ravenna mosaics. In addition to the ornate crown of Justinian in the San Vitale basilica [FIG 5.18], which identified him as emperor, saints carry crowns in their hands as they process across the clerestory wall of the Sant'Apollinare Nuovo basilica [FIG 5.19].

The image of a wreath on the lip of a baptism font in Sidi Jdidi is a good example of the polyvalent meaning of this symbol. The mosaic depicts a horse standing by the wreath where the animal's stance, especially the extended front right leg, suggests an equine pose [FIG 5.20]. Although this interpretation supports triumphal iconography, this equine identification was problematic, firstly because horses rarely appear in early Christian art and secondly, because the context of this mosaic suggests another animal altogether. One of the few examples of horses depicted in a Christian context is located in the Via Latina catacomb (fourth century), where horses pull Elijah's chariot as he ascends to heaven in a manner similar to depictions of apotheosis. Here the identification of the animals as horses is unequivocal [FIG 5.21].[314] Despite pointing out the obvious ovine aspects of the animal's cloven hooves on the Sidi Jdidi baptism font, scholars initially concluded that the animal is a horse.[315] The quality of the mosaicist's composition is not problematic, and one might concede that the stripes on the animal's back are the result of the artist's possible misunderstanding of *chiaroscuro.* More recently, scholars have tentatively suggested that the animal, and indeed its counterpart on the other side of the basin (identified by the few tesserae that make up its tail) may be a lamb.[316] I suggest the creatures are lambs, unequivocally. Early Christians shunned circuses and games, so it would be surprising to find an equine depiction that was closely associated with Roman races in a Christian baptismal context. It is solely the action of lifting the front leg, as champion horses were commonly depicted, that confuses the identification of the animal here. The shape of the ears, the cloven

[314] 2 Kings 2: 11 "(…) behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."
[315] Bonifay 2004, 138
[316] Ben-Abed (2004), 317

hooves, the way in which the stripes on its coat evoke a textured woollen fleece, its plump hind quarters and long tail are characteristics that have more in common with early Christian depictions of lambs, frequently found in mosaics and on sarcophagi [FIG 5.22]. Furthermore, images of lambs often include wreathed crosses, signifying the triumph of Christ over death through his Passion. This association makes the lamb a more appropriate symbol than a horse in this baptismal context.

Both Jewish and early Christian traditions depict divine apotheoses. In Jewish tradition, an anthropomorphic Sun God (or the Sun disc itself, as is the case in Sepphoris) appears on central, circular panels of synagogue Zodiac pavements, in a *quadriga* pulled by four horses [FIG 5.7]. Beneath St Peter's basilica, on the ceiling of the vaulted tomb of the Julii, an image of Sol Invictus appears in a chariot pulled by horses. [FIG 5.23]. The apotheosis of the prophet Elijah is similarly depicted in the cubiculum B of the Via Latina catacomb, where the prophet drives a *quadriga* of horses into the sky [FIG 5.21]. This imagery reflects the biblical passage "Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." (2 Kings 2: 11). The image also appears on the sarcophagus of Flavius Stilicho, in Sant'Ambrogio, dated to the fifth century, alongside other Old Testament scenes [FIG 5.24]. Horses pulling a chariot across the sky, thought to be an element of Elijah's apotheosis, are also present in the heavily damaged apse of the St Aquilinus chapel, in the basilica of St Lawrence in Milan [FIG 5.25]. This iconography indicates a familiarity not only with the concept of apotheosis, but also with its associated iconographic tradition. It also demonstrates, almost exclusively in early Christian art, the use of horses.

Martyrdom Iconography

Despite a strong association with funerary contexts and the rise of martyr cults, martyr imagery was also found on North African ceramics, lamps and tableware from the

fourth century.[317] The *Dextera Dei* crowning a person as martyr was a symbol that recognized and rewarded that individual's sacrifice, for the martyr had been tortured and died for his or her faith. The wreath signified a victory over death and the attainment of Paradise, but not exclusively for martyrs. According to some scholars, the wreath also signified the "four last things" (death, judgement, hell and heaven) and eternal glory.[318] In an early Christian context, the *Dextera Dei* became closely associated with martyrdom iconography when it extended a wreath or crown over the head of a (usually male) figure. This was not the only way martyrs were depicted; however, as they could also be shown, as Saint Thecla, with hands bound facing the beasts [FIG 5.26].[319] Consequently, it is important to consider the attributes associated with elements of fourth- and fifth-century martyrdom iconography, in order to appreciate the subtleties of the deacon's mosaic and identify whether or not Crescentius died a martyr.

Galit Noga-Banai recently explored a small corpus of Early Christian silver caskets that capture some elements of martyr iconography. She emphasises the importance of these reliquaries as part of a broader discussion about the rise of martyr cults in the latter part of the fourth century.[320] She questions the intended purpose of these 16 small objects and also their iconography and provenance, and puts forward a new conclusion about their origins. For our purposes, the so-called Capsella Africana is the most relevant object [FIG 4.9]. The embossed image on the lid of this silver casket shows what had become by then a conventional depiction of an early Christian martyr. A beardless man stands, with bare feet, on the source of the four rivers of Paradise, in a representation similar to that of Christ.[321] This central figure is flanked by two large candles, a familiar configuration in early Christian North African funeral art. The young man wears a patterned toga and holds a wreath in front of him. The *Dextera Dei* descends from Heaven with another wreath to crown him and both

[317] Such compositions appeared in Roman tombs and Christian catacombs, tombstones and pavement mosaics. Noga-Banai, 2008; For other objects, Salomonson, 1979
[318] Mackie 1995, 95
[319] For more on St Thecla, see Castelli 2007.
[320] Noga-Banai, 2008
[321] Noga-Banai 2008, 66

wreaths are aligned.[322] The wreath in the *Dextera Dei* indicates that the status of martyr comes from God. The small oval casket (11 x 18.5 x 7.5 cm), is dated approximately to the second quarter of the fifth century, and the identification of this figure as a martyr is based on the fact that he is being crowned by the *Dextera Dei*.[323] This pictorial device conveys the deceased's status as a martyr who had sacrificed his life as a witness to Faith. The silver receptacle was meant to receive the martyr's bones or relics. Several tomb covers from the Chapel of the Martyrs represent the deceased in a similar manner as flanked by lit tapers and standing frontally, in an *orant* pose, some with hands sticking out by their sides for lack of space [FIG 5.27]. Notwithstanding the strong similarities between these tomb covers and martyr imagery, these tomb figures are not identifiable as martyrs since they are not shown with crowns, or being crowned by God, or with any other relevant attribute. Moreover, their epitaphs make no conclusive mention of martyrdom.

The golden dome medallion located in the apex of the San Vittore in Ciel D'Oro chapel in Milan's San Ambrogio basilica is another example of how martyrs were represented and commemorated by early Christians [FIG 5.28]. In this small memorial shrine the bust of Victor, the chapel's titular saint, is inscribed within an elaborate beribboned wreath composed of fruit, flowers and garlands thought to convey the passage of time. The red oval-shaped item at the top of the wreath, highlighted in gold, has been identified as a "flame-like jewel" and interpreted as the Paschal flame. This association with Easter signified the light and radiance of the resurrection of Christ, shared by Victor in his triumph over death.[324] This interpretation is plausible; however, in this context, I suggest that the flame has more in common with imagery found in the Pentecost narrative where, through the miracle of the Spirit, the apostles start their ministry after receiving the Spirit via a tongue of fire (Acts 2: 1-13). This miracle allowed them to be understood in any language:

[322] "These crowns designate the personage as a martyr" Noga-Banai 2008, 64
[323] Noga-Banai 2008, 159
[324] Mackie 2003, 120

> And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

In a similar fashion, the Spirit manifested itself over the martyr as a tongue of flame above his head, indicating how he was blessed by God and received the Spirit from Him. The venerated martyr then assumed his role as intercessor between God and the congregation and as the apostles did, he also bore witness to God's greatness. The *Dextera Dei* extends a small jewelled wreath to crown the martyr's head, so there are in fact two wreaths in this image. The man is beardless and is flanked by two large crosses with his hand holding the monogrammatic cross on his right. The name "Victor", written in the book that the man holds open in front of him with his left hand, identified the martyr's name and also referred to the victorious, triumphal aspects of martyrdom and of this type of imagery.[325] The whole scene is presented against a gold background and positioned in the apex of the small chapel's dome. There is no evidence that this image represented Christ, especially when one considers the implication of the flame atop the martyr's head, indicating how he has received the Spirit.

Summary

The most memorable aspect of martyr iconography is its adaptability — the images are very different, yet they clearly represent martyrs. In addition to the iconography, this recognition depends on a combination of factors including context, purpose, intent and location. Importantly, the various ways in which martyrs are depicted mainly revolve around which aspects of their story, or their triumph, the patron who commissioned the artistic work wished to exploit. There is sufficient flexibility, created by a choice of symbolism, to support various messages, yet the images are all understood to represent martyrs. The purpose of the Capsella Africana, to contain martyr relics, informs the viewer through the image on its lid. In a similar fashion, the mosaic that represents Victor is identified as such because it is located in a commemorative chapel dedicated to the saint, but the name in the mosaic, which

[325] The identity of the martyr is confirmed by two sources. Mackie 2003, 117

is corroborated by other sources, is also helpful. On the question of the wreath, not all crowns promised to Christians necessarily implied suffering or martyrdom; this symbol was also extended in recognition of a life well-led and an unshakeable faith. Consequently, the figures on the Crescentinus mosaic should not immediately call to mind martyrdom, regardless of the presence of a crown extended to the central figure: here the deceased does not yet wear or possess the single crown extended to him by God.

Although the presence of a wreath may be a subtle key to understanding early martyr iconography, it seems that whomever possesses the wreath is also important. In addition, the presence of two wreaths on the silver casket and in the mosaic dome (one on the martyr's head and one extended to him from God above) may suggest that it is the arrangement that best conveys martyrdom, or sanctity. Similarly, the top two horsemen in Crescentinus' mosaic panel already wear a wreath indicating that they have already received the honours bestowed upon them. Turning now to documentary evidence, the following section considers the contribution of early Christian writings to better understand the symbolism of wreaths, as well as analysing the mosaic's epitaph.

5.4 Epigraphy

In addition to the iconographical developments discussed above, the wreath endures as an important symbol in Patristic writings and in the New Testament. In chapter XV of *De corona militis* for example, Tertullian relates an initiation into the cult of Mithras, where the initiate refuses to wear the crown. In this section of his work, Tertullian defends the behaviour of a soldier who was identified as Christian because he refused to wear a garland during a ceremony. The author draws parallels between both stories:

> Keep for God His own property untainted; He will crown it if He choose (…) To him who conquers He says, "I will give a *crown of life*." Be you, too, faithful unto death, and fight you, too, the good fight, whose *crown* the apostle feels so justly confident has been laid up for him. The angel also, as he goes forth on a white horse, conquering and to conquer, receives a *crown of victory;* and another is adorned with an encircling rainbow (as it were in its fair colours)

> — a celestial meadow. In like manner, the elders sit crowned around, crowned too with a *crown* of gold, and the Son of Man Himself flashes out above the clouds. If such are the appearances in the vision of the seer, of what sort will be the realities in the actual manifestation? Look at those *crowns*. Inhale those odours. Why condemn you to a little chaplet, or a twisted headband, the brow which has been destined for a diadem? For Christ Jesus has made us even kings to God and His Father (…) by choosing which the good soldier, too, has got promotion in the heavenly ranks. Blush, ye fellow-soldiers of his, henceforth not to be condemned even by him, but by some soldier of Mithras, who, at his initiation in the gloomy cavern, in the camp, it may well be said, of darkness, when at the sword's point a *crown* is presented to him, as though in mimicry of martyrdom, and thereupon put upon his head, is admonished to resist and cast it off, and, if you like, transfer it to his shoulder, saying that Mithras is his crown. And thenceforth he is never crowned; and he has that for a mark to show who he is, if anywhere he be subjected to trial in respect of his religion; and he is at once believed to be a soldier of Mithras if he throws the *crown* away--if he says that in his god he has his *crown*. Let us take note of the devices of the devil, who is wont to ape some of God's things with no other design than, by the faithfulness of his servants, to put us to shame, and to condemn us.[326]

Passages from the New Testament also identify five crowns. These symbols indicate victory over death and tribulations, but also carry the eternal, joyous quality of Paradise:

- *Crown of righteousness*: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Tim 4:8)
- *Crown of life*: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." (James 1:12) "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten

[326] Tertullian, *Cor.* XV

days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev 2:10)

- *Crown of Glory*: "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."(1 Pet 5:4)
- *Incorruptible crown*: "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we, an incorruptible one." (1 Cor 9:24-25)
- *Crown of Joy*: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" (1 Thess 2:19)

These examples also emphasize God as the source of such blessings. In Revelations, the eschatological dimension of the crown symbol is reinforced:

- "And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer." (Rev 6:2)
- "And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle." (Rev 14:14)

This documentary evidence demonstrates how early Christian themes of triumph, eternal life and victory were expressed through the crown symbol. We have seen how this motif was one easily borrowed from extant and previous pictorial traditions, and expanded upon through its use in various Christian iconographical contexts. Returning now to Crescentinus' tomb cover, the following section considers the deacon's epitaph.

It is fortunate to have a well conserved inscription that provides information about Crescentinus, as well as clues to the patron's expectations. The epitaph's wording, in red tesserae, reads:

> ANGELORUM [H]OSPES / MARTYRUM COMES / VITAMQUE SPIRANS / PLACIDAM AD TE SANC/TE PROFECTUS SIT NOST/RI MEMOR GRATA PIE/TATE QUA SOLET / CRESCENTINUS DIAC[ONUS] / IN PACE RED[DIDIT] III KAL[ENDAS] AUG[USTAS].[327] [FIG 5.1]

Gauckler indicated the presence of a palm leaf just before the deacon's name, which suggested to him that the deacon died as a martyr. This part of the mosaic was damaged however, and the reproduction of the mosaic in Gauckler's article does not show this palm.[328] The proposed position of this symbol is accommodated by a gap in the words, although it is difficult to confirm what exactly was represented there. The palm was mainly considered to be another symbol of resurrection and victory over death for Christians and it was not a symbol strictly associated with martyrdom. Frédérick Tristan suggested more recently that when the image of a palm was included in a tomb's inscription, rather than martyrdom, it indicated an active participation within the Christian congregation. A palm included in Crescentinus' epitaph may have indicated his leadership within the community, as well as celestial felicity and bliss in the after-life.[329] Future research may focus on whether the presence of a palm reinforces the interpretation of the paradisiacal garden in the top panel of the mosaic.

The initial translation of the inscription reads: "Companion of martyrs and host of angels, breathing a placid life. He has gone up to you in safety. May he be mindful of us with the grace and piety that is usual for him. Crescentinus, deacon, in peace. Returned his soul on July 30."[330] Alexander suggested that "vitamque spirans placidam ad te sancte" be

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[327] Duval 1984, 431; Epigraphic Database Heidelberg
[328] Gauckler 1906, 205
[329] Tristan 1996, 109
[330] This initial translation was suggested by Duval 1984, 1:431 and reprised more recently in Burns 2014, 119

translated as "he (Crescentinus) be granted sanctity and a calm life."[331] Yet, Crescentinus had already led a life of piety and devotion and the vocative "Sancte" could be understood as the patron calling to God "ad te Sancte profectus" "may he depart to you, Holy one." The epithet "Sancte" does not apply to Crescentinus.

I suggest that the inscription reads: "Host of angels and companion of martyrs, embodying a peaceful life. May he depart to you, Holy one. Remember us, Deacon Crescentinus, through your customary devotion. He returned in peace on 30 July." The terms "[h]ospes", "comes" and "spirans" relate to the deacon and his life; "spirans" is translated here as "imbued with", "exuding" or "embodying", where the deacon's manner of living is held up as exemplary and a means to a paradisiacal end. This translation not only contrasts with previous ones, which suggested that he gained the calm life as a reward, but it also supports the imagery that shows the deacon reaching for a crown that will reward his faith. The Roman meaning of the term "pietas" does not translate as piety, but rather refers to Crescentinus' devotion, (the proper and apposite relations between one's self and God). Because of the special status he gained in death, the deacon can intercede with God on behalf of the faithful. This dedication was specifically chosen by the patron as a reminder to the community. Instead of the more common formula "IN PACE", which is found on the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic, for example, the inscription here indicated that Crescentinus returned (red[didit]) to God's holiness, which was an indication of his special status. Early Christians believed in bodily resurrection and that the kingdom of God was close at hand which is why there is an eschatological dimension to funereal, as well as baptismal, symbolism. This element of the inscription may imply a physical movement of the body back to God, something to be understood in a very physical, physiological sense.[332] "Redeo" can be considered as a transitive or intransitive verb. Whether it means that Crescentinus returned his soul to God (thus reverting to a past state, for example), or whether this return indicated a more physical movement where Crescentinus was taken back to God, remains unclear.[333]

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[331] Alexander 1987, 4
[332] Duval 1984, 466
[333] *Redire*: to go back to, to return–*Reddo*: to give back, restore, to surrender, to profit (the clothes profits the man – *vestis virum reddit*) - third-person singular perfect active indicative of *reddō*.

There is also a shift in the addressee within the inscription, indicating that the congregation calls upon both God "Sancte" and the deceased "nostri memor grata pietate qua solet Crescentinus". It is unclear from the literature if such an occurrence was common or even significant in early Christian Latin epigraphy. However, this shift is indicative of careful consideration on the part of the patron as it engages the community in appealing both to God and to the deacon. The manner in which the epitaph was written also reminded the congregation of Crescentinus' responsibility in the after-life, where he still interceded with God even in death. In fact, as a result of his exemplary life, his remains and his story are that much dearer to the community. He is an example to follow who is much closer in time and proximity to them than Jesus. Correspondingly, they feel more invested in his story and celebrate it through this text and its accompanying imagery. One can infer that the Deacon was included in prayers during worship as well, because his tomb was visible in the church.

The formula in this epitaph, in particular the use of "red[didit]", also evoked wording more commonly used on monuments dedicated to saints. In these cases, the inscriptions sought to establish a relationship with martyred saints and secure their recognition or intercession.[334] The saints were addressed directly, and asked to remember those who offered the monument.[335] Such formulae were common elements of these dedications, insofar as the wording clearly spelled out the underlying goal. As the monuments, offerings or donations were already considered to be a form of prayer, inscriptions were superfluous and consequently are thought to be a rare manifestation of martyr worship.[336] The use of a similar formula on Crescentinus' epitaph indicated that his status was such that, although not a martyr or a saint (as we have established that the term "sancte" addressed God and not the deacon), he was considered worthy of their presence, and worthy of executing the same role as intermediary between the congregation and God. The wording of the epitaph establishes that although Crescentinus was blessed enough to be a host to martyrs and angels, he was

[334] Duval 1984, 588
[335] Duval 1984, 589
[336] Duval 1984, 589

not one of them. Nor was he a saint; the choice to refer to him as such in the dedication would have been easy enough for the patron, yet he is not identified as a saint. The following section better defines the distinctions between sainthood and martyrdom in early Christianity.

5.5 Martyrdom and Sanctity

The conflation of martyrdom and sainthood happened early in Christianity, mainly because there was no formal or official recognition in place to acknowledge saints. The local veneration of martyrs spread rapidly, and as relics were acquired, donated, translated (moved from one church to another) and gifted to various basilicas and shrines across the Mediterranean, the development of martyr cults followed. The translation of martyr relics was an early form of canonization, defined as an overt recognition by the Church of the sanctity of the deceased and acknowledgement of their holy status.[337] These relics were usually placed in an altar, or *mensa,* such as is depicted on the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic, or buried [FIG 4.2]. There is no evidence of a regulated canonization process in the first few centuries of Christianity. Rules around canonization are thought to have evolved at first outside Rome, notably in North Africa where there was a need to identify true martyrs as a result of schisms and the singularly rapid rise of the martyr cult. From the second century, congregations celebrated feast days in honour of the martyrs and venerated their remains accordingly. Martyrs' relics and remains thus became prized by bishops, as it was thought that the power they carried extended to the church that owned them. This has been perceived by some scholars as a privatisation of power in the hands of a few patrons able to acquire such items.[338]

Importantly, the responsibility to recognize and honour a martyr rested with the local bishop, who remained the primary authority in the matter. Local tradition relied on relics, most often a body part, and needed to provide a relatable account of the martyr's story for

[337] Kemp 1948, 2; Yasin 2009, chapter 5
[338] Brown 1981, 32

their feast days. Even as martyrdom was still being defined as a category of sacredness, the faithful understood its significance and the "influential character of the memory it preserved for interpreting and sanctioning" their lives as Christians.[339] The community recognized its own heroes and in doing so, participated at least in the beginning in creating a collective memory surrounding martyr narratives. Those who died for their faith were triumphant, victorious and heroic, all of which are attributes expressed through apotheosis imagery, and symbols such as the crown and *Dextera Dei*. Early on, the cult of a martyr was associated with the place where he or she was tortured or buried and bore witness to their beliefs.[340] This form of recognition and identification was the earliest attestation of martyrdom and a type of spontaneous canonisation carried out by the local community. There was no time or need to investigate whether or not a martyr deserved canonization: communities were small and members of the Church knew each other and knew the actions associated with a particular martyr. In addition, there was no official process or established canon for clergy to follow, so local bishops were instrumental in accepting martyrs and saints for their community. Consequently, martyrdom was celebrated as a great occasion. Remains were collected and treated with reverence. In some instances, a basilica, shrine or chapel was named for the martyr whom it commemorated. The heroic aspect of a martyr's death elevated them spiritually to secure a new dimension of sacredness at God's side. Fundamentally, saints transmitted God's holiness to the faithful through the spiritual and blessed function they assumed when they died. This principle was reinforced, for communities, through the possession of relics. Although there were still no guidelines to formalise the canonization process, evidence from the fourth and fifth centuries records clergy's concerns with roadside altars that did not contain real relics.[341] This became a preoccupation mainly in North Africa, where the sites of altars and buried relics were connected consistently.[342] Such was the concern around these true and false *memoriae* that legislation was passed at the Council of Carthage (401) in order to protect the populace against superstition. This canon allowed local bishops to destroy altars that were not built atop the remains or relics of a saint.

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[339] Castelli 2007, 143
[340] Kemp 1948, 6
[341] Kemp 1948, 14
[342] Yasin 2007, 153.

Toward the fifth century, ecclesiastical authorities acknowledged the need to recognize another type of sacrifice. Other Christians boldly suffered for their faith but did not die, others confessed their faith but did not die for it, and it is difficult to know what became of them. Some persecuted Christians died in prison and such a death was still considered an execution by their contemporaries. From sources in the second and third centuries, there is already evidence of a different, more spiritual category of sainthood. These Christians bore witness to their beliefs in both life and word, if not sacrifice; they had conducted themselves according to the word of the Gospels and demonstrated their love for the Lord through their actions. This kind of sainthood was the outcome of exemplary piety and strong faith, and these demonstrable and recognizable heroic virtues qualified these Christians for canonization.[343] I propose that Crescentinus, although not a saint, was honoured in this tradition and was expected to act, as a saint or martyr would, as an intercessor for his congregation. Crescentinus was accorded the same respect as that given to martyrs, though in contrast to martyrs honoured for their sacrifice, he was recognized for the meritorious way he lived.

Although it is difficult to determine whether, or even if, this narrative influenced the Crescentinus mosaic, there is also lore surrounding Crescentinus' namesake, Saint Crescentinus. This patron saint of Urbino was a soldier martyred in 303, under Diocletian. He is usually depicted on horseback, wearing armour and slaying a dragon, or represented as a deacon crushing a serpent beneath his feet.[344] His actions led to the spread of Christianity across the region. Pope Clement XI commissioned a statue of the saint for Saint Peter's basilica, yet it is unclear exactly when this imagery of the dragon emerged, as the earliest records date from the ninth century.

[343] Kemp 1948, 19
[344] Cahier, 1867

Summary

The discussion in this section reviewed key epigraphic documentation that conveys how early Christians thought about wreaths and crowns as indicative of victory and triumph. This is illustrated in early Christian funeral iconography where the wreath symbolises victory over death. In addition, the analysis focused on the use of the *Dextera Dei* and apotheosis imagery in other pictorial traditions, as well as martyr iconography to place the imagery of Crescentius' tomb cover within a wider artistic context. This discussion also offered a new interpretation of Crescentinus' epitaph based on a translation that demonstrates that the deacon was neither recorded as martyr nor saint but was still held in the same regard by a congregation who hoped that God would reward him appropriately. The careful wording of the epitaph explains the extent to which the community valued its deacon. Finally, a brief review of the idea of martyrdom and sainthood reveals that saints, and those venerated as such, did not always die as witnesses to their faith as persecutions were no longer carried out. The creation of a new category of sainthood and the development of more formal criteria for its recognition attests a need for early Christian communities to carry on this type of collective narratives initiated by martyr stories. Clergy and local authorities promoted stories of those who kept the faith as examples to imitate.

5.8 New Interpretation

The manner in which Crescentinus was depicted on his funeral mosaic, alongside the other figures on horseback, is clearly indebted to domestic scenes of the hunt [FIG 5.12]. Yet, in this funerary context — and with the wording on the epitaph and the image of the crown — one must acknowledge a strong affinity with scenes of apotheosis. The presence of horses points to this in particular, as these animals were not required to illustrate or reinforce the theme of the paradisiacal garden in which the figures are depicted. The angels and martyrs referred to in the epitaph, who welcome Crescentinus, also have no need to be on prancing steeds. Roman, Jewish and early Christian art used apotheosis iconography to illustrate how emperors and prophets, respectively, were taken up to God and came to be considered as divine, in the after-life. I argue that these pictorial devices were carefully chosen to depict Crescentinus and the other horsemen in order to refer to this triumphant imagery,

despite the absence of a chariot. It is the deliberate selection and layout of the images that produces new, and unique, iconographic meaning.

Crescentinus is depicted with his crowned cohorts (angels and martyrs, as suggested by the epitaph) reaching for the crown he has earned through leading an exemplary life. The *Dextera Dei* indicates here that God was the source of heavenly felicity, of triumph over death and ultimately, of eternal life. The symbol of the crown evolved, then, from a Roman context where it was seen as a reward bestowed on winners of athletic or military competitions, to divine recognition of imperial power. In a Christian context, the crown came to symbolize a reward for spiritual rectitude, the afterlife, and victory over death, in addition to martyrdom. On Crescentinus' mosaic, the patron or artist chose to include only the crown and *Dextera Dei* as visual attributes of martyrdom, yet these symbols are not strictly associated with martyr iconography. The rest of the image, the mosaic's layout and the epitaph support an alternative reading of the crown and *Dextera Dei* symbols. The symbolism used on Crescentinus' tomb cover differs significantly enough from the more recognizable martyr imagery, described in section 5.3, to suggest that the deacon did not die as a martyr. This interpretation of the imagery differs from previous ones and consequently, the deacon's life and death are understood differently. Despite the presence of the wreath extended to the deacon by the *Dextera Dei*, more subtle clues in the mosaic are supported by the inscription. The deacon is not represented alone in the image; rather, he is received in the paradisiacal garden of afterlife by angels and martyrs. The discussion on iconographical comparanda and antecedents shows that, pictorially, the crown is in fact the device by which God extended a special, sacred status to Crescentinus, marking him as victorious, but not as a saint or martyr. Crescentinus' epitaph invokes, in a similar manner, the meaning of the imperial *decursio*'s apotheosis and deification scene. Here the deacon does not merely "rest", or "rest in peace", but he is called back to God, or taken up to him and is not deified but rather is recognised by God as worthy of special status, similar to that accorded to martyrs and angels.

Choosing what to put on the tomb cover creates a personal story that ultimately contributes to a community's collective memory. For the congregation, this tomb cover conveyed the idea that Paradise was attainable if one conducted him or herself according to the rule of God: each would receive their crown. The epitaph is further evidence of interaction between the congregation and the deceased; hence, the relationship does not stop upon the deacon's death. Instead, because his story has become part of the fabric of the building, the activities he carried out in the church during his lifetime continue, to some extent. Although it is impossible to draw firm conclusions about patronage here, the placement of the tomb within the building's pavement indicates at least some involvement from local clergy and the bishop, and confirmation that they recognized and at least condoned the deacon's sacred status. Furthermore, the person or people who commissioned the work carefully chose the words on the inscription and what to illustrate on the mosaic in order to commit the deacon to the congregation's collective memory.

5.9 Conclusion

The investigation in this chapter has confirmed that Crescentinus was regarded by his local congregation as a hero who conquered death, that he was taken to Paradise and rewarded by God, but not that he was a martyr. The mosaic's imagery conveys this by drawing on the iconography of apotheosis, such as the *decursio*, and by using the wreath as a symbol of triumph and victory. The inscription indicates that Crescentinus is not a martyr, but is to be considered in their very close company. His place amongst saint and martyrs is displayed in the unique and concise use of martyr-related symbols of the crown and *Dextera Dei*.

The findings in this chapter indicate that even as the deacon was venerated in his community as a martyr or saint, he was neither. The imagery of the mosaic and the epitaph not only inform the viewer about the deacon's death, they also allow a glimpse into how Christians conceived of the afterlife. In addition, the epitaph further defines the expectations the community and patron placed on God and on their deceased colleagues. The epitaph also expressed the belief of the patron and community that the deacon should be, at the very least, welcomed in Paradise. These messages were articulated through a careful selection of images and wording. What is said on the epitaph is as important as what is omitted and the

ambiguity over Crescentius' status (as saint or martyr) could have clarified by the simple use of an appropriate expression in the epitaph's writing. Although we cannot define the involvement of parties in creating this artwork, its location and original meaning provide clues to the viewer as to the intent of the patron and, by extension, the community. The patron who commissioned the work expressed the desire that the deacon would comport himself in death, as he had in life, and continue his role as intercessor with God, on the congregation's behalf. There is another, well-known reference to horses in the New Testament, specifically in Revelation when the Lamb opens the seals (Rev 6). The deacon's tomb cover does reflect this biblical passage: in the first instance, the mosaic is one horseman short of the Apocalypse. Furthermore, no analysis of the mosaic supports an eschatological reading of its imagery. One final New Testament narrative that can be considered here is the conversion of Saul of Tarsus on his way to Damascus (Acts 3-9). In this case, Jesus addressed Saul and smote him, appearing as a light and manifesting as a voice. It is unlikely that the Crescentinus mosaic refers to this story.

CONCLUSION

This thesis provides new information about the iconography of three fifth-century early Christian Tunisian mosaics, and their context of production. This thesis also identifies new avenues of enquiry, in different disciplines. The scholarship review undertaken in the first chapter supports the adoption of a holistic approach, facilitated through the use of the case-study model. The adaptability of this method allows us to focus on a mosaic's particular inscriptions, subject matter, viewership and location, as well as to determine clues about its patronage. Then, by replacing the monument in a broader historical and art historical context, through the introduction and discussion of comparanda that have not been considered before, and by analysing the meaning of inscriptions in immediate association with a monument's iconography, a sharper picture emerges about how the mosaic contributed to a community's religious life and legacy.

The *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic illustrates the Chapel of the Martyrs in which it was laid. I showed how this rambling treatment of architectural space was used commonly in Roman art from the first century. Consequently, it is the Christian funerary context that makes this image unique, in addition to the enigmatic use of the expression *Ecclesia Mater* in its epitaph. It is especially important to recreate the contemporary context of production and the viewer's perspective because these considerations underpin part of the image's message. The viewer's position, the artist's rendering of the image, as well as the placement of the mosaic within the Chapel of the Martyrs, were key to its message and interpretation. What is more, the richness in symbolism attributed to the image by its context and epitaph mean that it can be interpreted, realistically, as the representation of a basilica, but also in more abstract and even spiritual terms, as the local community and as the local Church.

The comparanda introduced to analyse the Demna baptistery font imagery are restricted to a ritual context, yet the mosaic imagery shows a high level of creativity and adroitness. In this case, reading the iconographic programme in the font as if it were an inverted dome allows a coherent interpretation of the mosaic's iconography, something that previous analyses failed to achieve. Furthermore, I have strongly argued for the need to review the baptistery's assigned date of the sixth century, by providing evidence and a context

that support an earlier date of the fifth century. However, without further discoveries, this interpretation remains difficult to prove. The imagery in this font calls attention to itself, and as such is evidence of intent, design and execution of a planned, coherent and pertinent visual programme by patrons who referred to standard fifth-century baptistery dome iconography that was also exemplified in the extant Neonian and Arian baptistery domes of Ravenna.

Analysing deacon Crescentinus' tomb inscription alongside the iconography of its upper panel suggests that the deacon was not remembered as a saint. By drawing on the iconography of apotheosis, and interpreting the wreath as a mark of triumph, the notion that Crescentinus was martyred is moot. This idea is further reinforced by historical considerations, as acts of martyrdom were rare by the fifth century. This mosaic shows that the Church was adaptable in creating a new category of sanctity, where living an exemplary life was rewarded by God, in a manner similar to martyrdom. It is within this framework that we must interpret the tomb mosaic. The epitaph carried the hope of the congregation that God would welcome Crescentinus into a blessed afterlife and consider him a peer of martyrs and angels. This interpretation eliminates ambiguity surrounding the identification of Crescentinus, who died serving his community. In addition, the inscription and iconography present a picture of what the patron and community expected from the deacon in death and the afterlife.

Recreating the context of these mosaics has shifted their previously accepted meaning from one of salvation to one of triumph through Christ and the belief in God, and all three exhibit this idea in different fashions. In the Demna baptistery font, the ritual and salvific context of baptism means that the triumphal aspects of the font's symbols find meaning in iterations of Christ and the Trinity (staurograms, articulated domes, dove and the *hetoimasia*). Although not as grandiose a depiction as that found in the Ravenna baptism domes, this mosaic takes on another, more intimate function insofar as it surrounds and supports the neophyte during his own baptism. This idea is reinforced by a lack of figural representations in the basin and the position of the staurogram on the bottom (or inverted apex), which further suggests a conflation between the neophyte undergoing the ritual and that of Christ, referred to in the inverted dome imagery. The imagery used in the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic conveys an important local flavour because it depicts the local Chapel of the

Martyrs. In addition, the relationship between image and epitaph intimates a confidence that Valentia is now defined through her relationship with God and her belonging to the local Tabarkan community. The local Church is also celebrated through the prominence of its representation. Finally, linking the imagery of Crescentius' mosaic to that of apotheosis shows how God bestows victory on those who live according to His word. Here, Crescentinus is taken up to a paradisiacal garden, where he will lead a blessed afterlife in the presence of martyrs and angels. The conclusions of this study have raised several more questions and certainly identify the possibility of, and perhaps the need to review early Christian monuments that have yet to benefit from modern social, art historical and historical information.

There can be no doubt as to the importance of early Christian communities in the production of their artistic legacy, a fact highlighted by the agency and patronage of laypersons and clergy in the early Church. In the process of studying these three mosaics, I have in fact discovered much more than I anticipated about the communities who conceived them, crafted them, viewed them and dedicated them to the living, to the dead and to God. This was a most unexpected and rewarding journey.

"Vita brevis, ars longa (…)"
Hippocrates, *Aphorismi*

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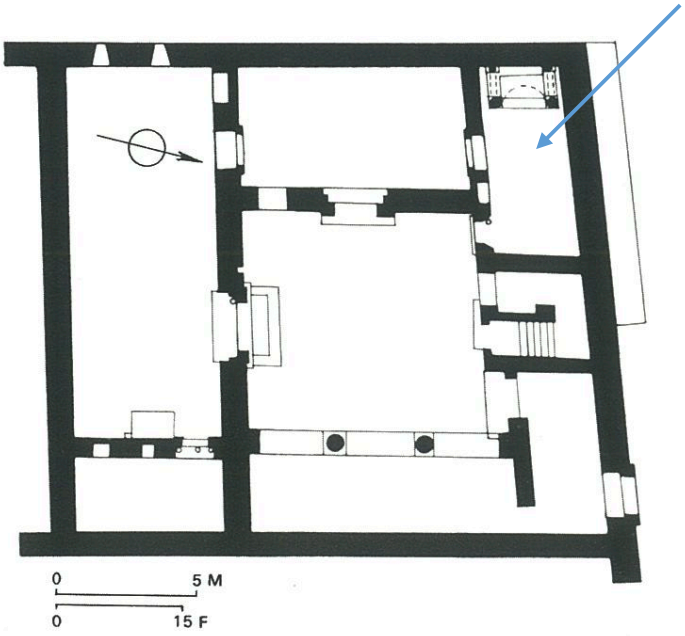

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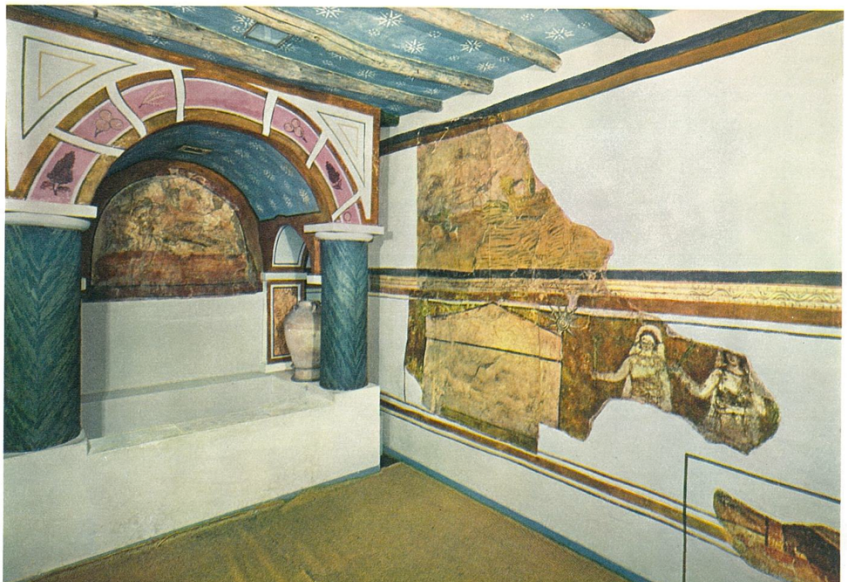

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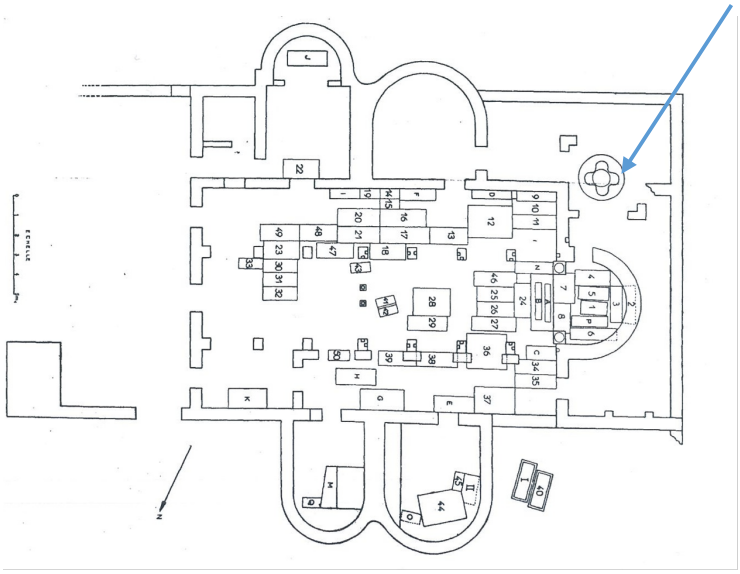

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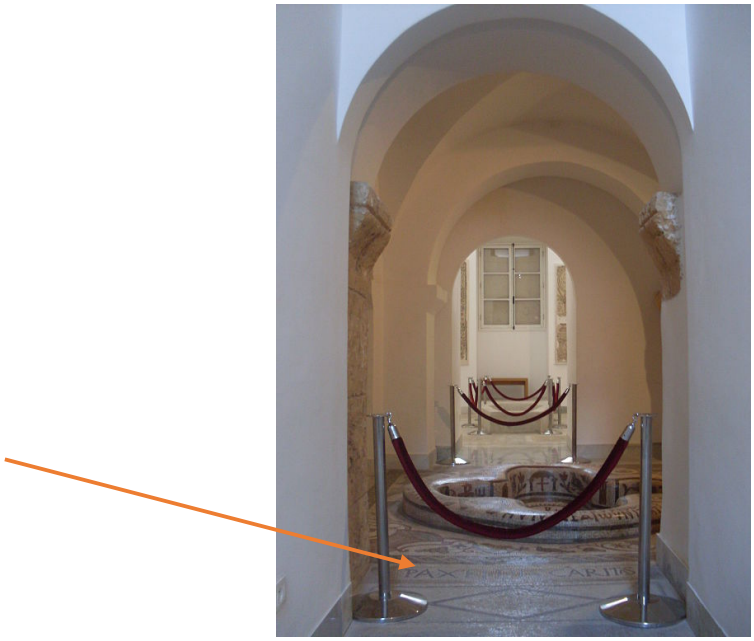

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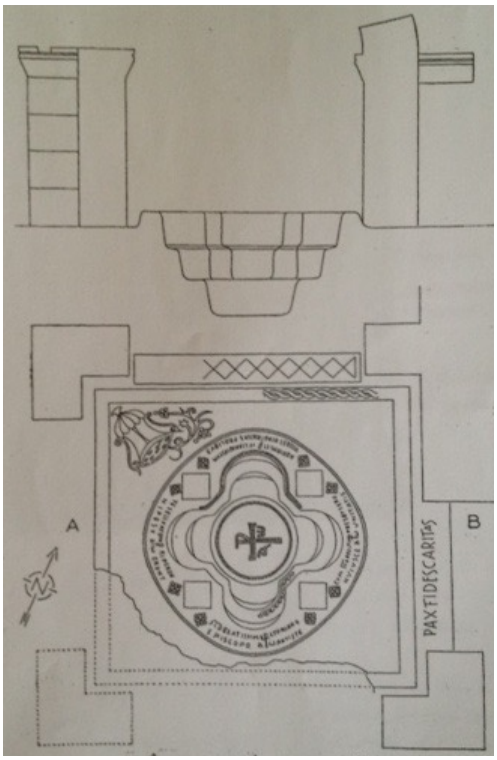

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2.16 Fifth-century Neonian baptistery dome mosaic in Ravenna. The baptism of Christ appears in the centre of the dome, surrounded by a ring where the 12 apostles appear carrying crowns in their veiled hands. The lower level of the dome's imagery shows alternating prepared thrones with open Gospels and elaborate niches.

2.17 Neonian baptistery dome mosaic detail: *hetoimasia* decorated with gems.

2.18 Neonian baptistery dome mosaic detail: centre medallion depicting the baptism of Jesus. This central vignette shows John the Baptist baptising Jesus who stands naked in the river Jordan represented as an old man. A dove descends from above.

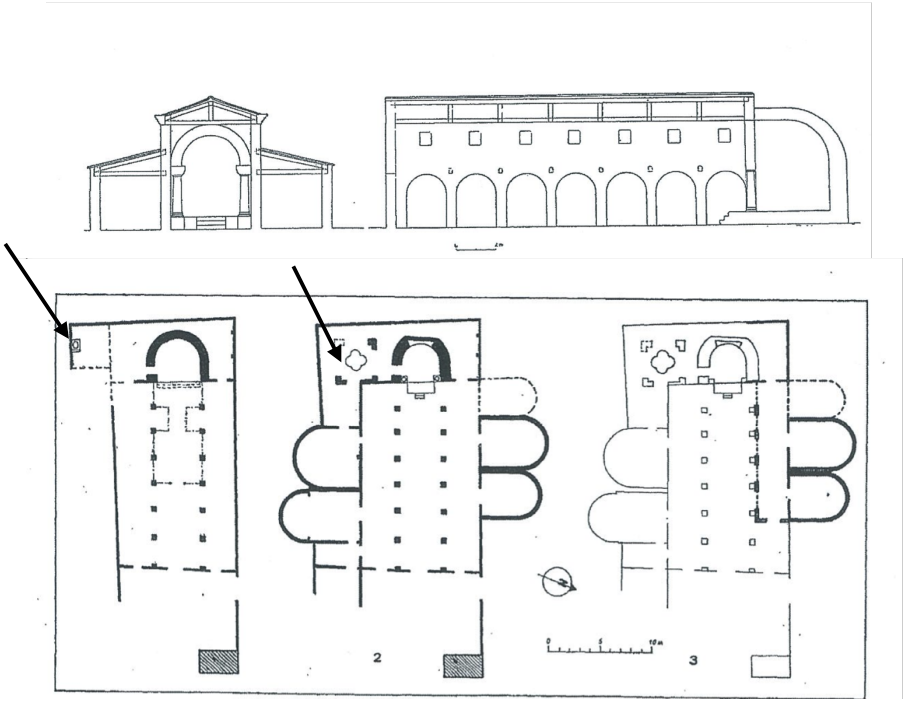
2.19 Fifth-century Arian baptistery dome mosaic, in Ravenna. The central medallion shows the baptism of Christ and a procession of apostles is shown in the next outer ring. The apostles meet on either side of a prepared throne.

2.20 Arian baptistery dome mosaic detail: procession of apostles.

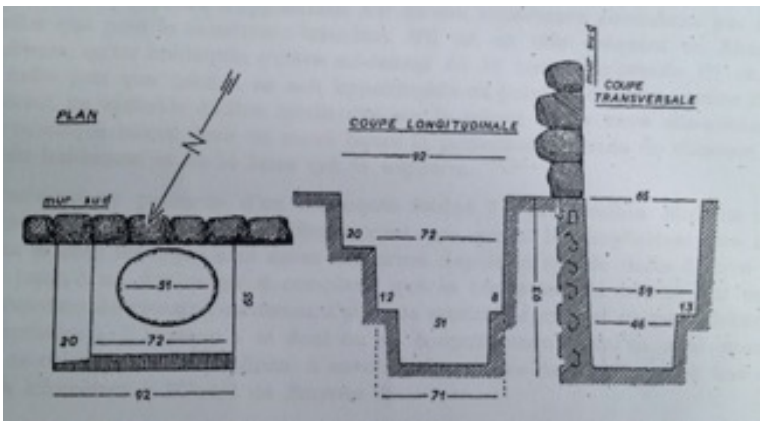
2.21 Arian baptistery dome mosaic detail: the Trinitarian alignment between Jesus the Son, the Spirit depicted by the dove and God represented by the *hetoimasia*.

2.22 Thapsus, Baptismal font found near Bekalta, now in the Sousse Archaeological Museum (Photo: Nathan Dennis).

3: Dating the Felix Basilica and Baptistery in Demna

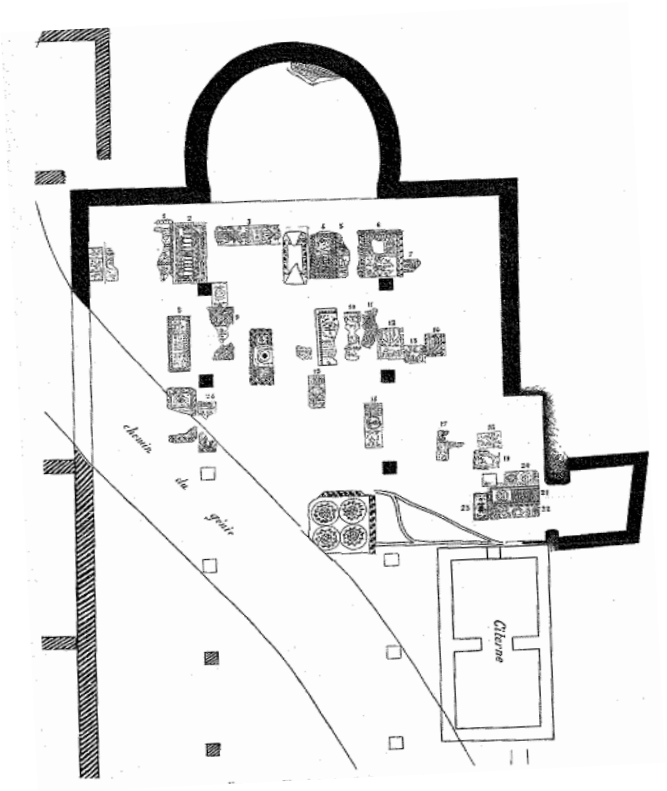


3.1 Proposed elevation and Duval's history of the Felix basilica in Demna. The plan illustrates the first phase of the basilica (fourth century) and the arrow points to the first font. The middle plan shows the second and third phases of use, (sixth century) and the arrow points to the baptistery. The last plan reflects the basilica's last phase of usage.



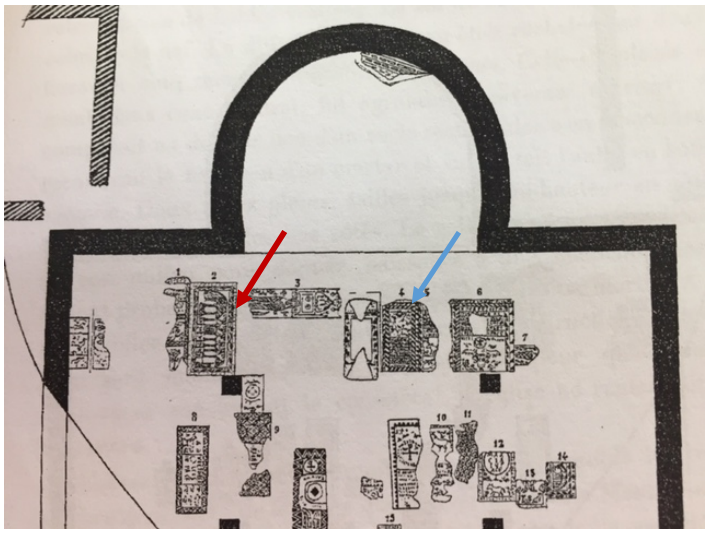
3.2 Illustration depicting cross-sections and views of the first font of the Felix Basilica in Demna.

4: The *Ecclesia Mater* Mosaic



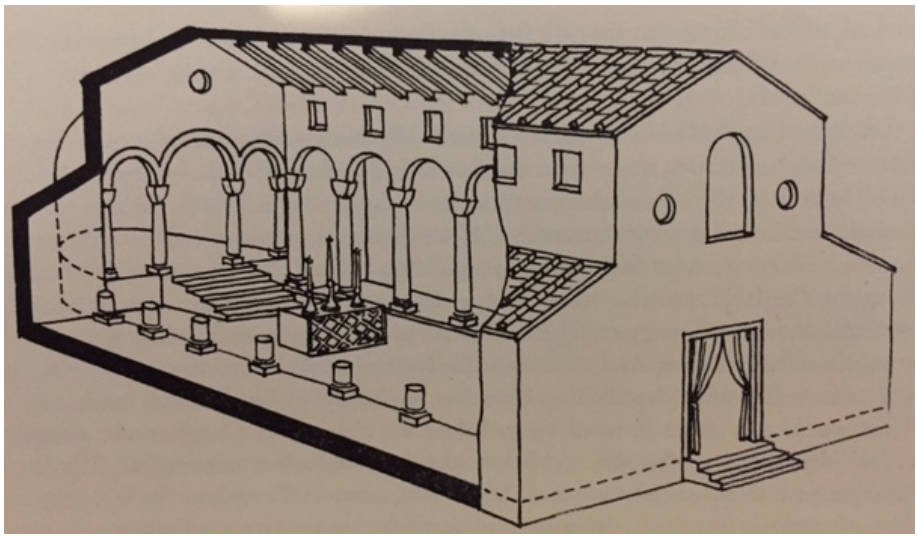
4.1 Chapel of the Martyrs' plan. Tabarka, Tunisia.

4.2 Fifth-century *Ecclesia Mater* tomb mosaic, Chapel of the Martyrs, Tabarka. Bardo museum, Tunis.

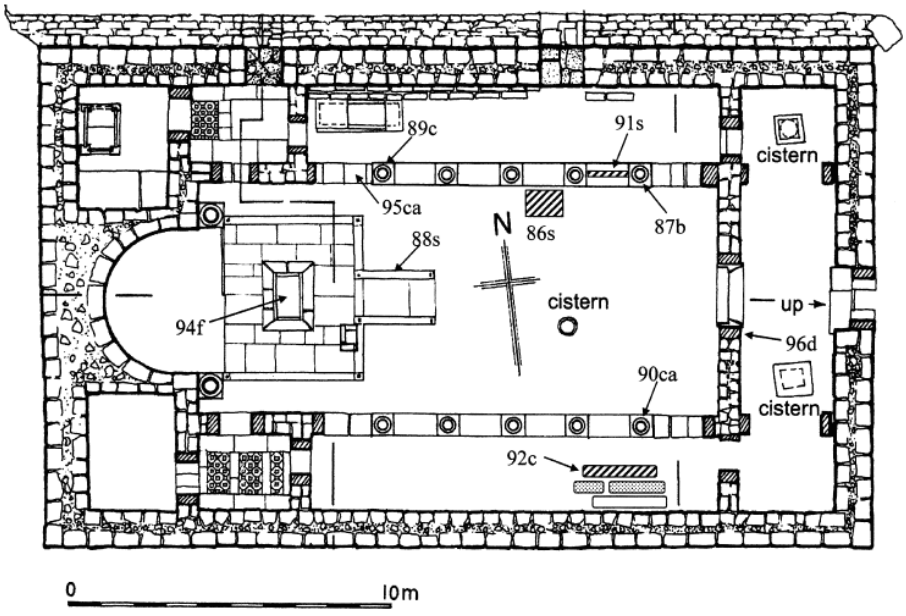


4.3 Chapel of the Martyrs' plan detailing the positions of the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic (red arrow) and Crescentinus' mosaics (blue arrow).

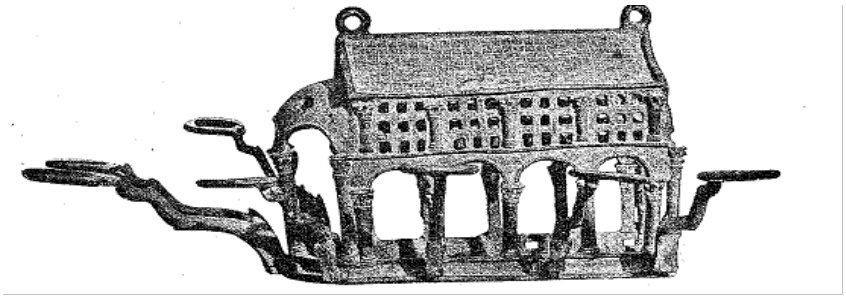
4.4 Fifth-century trifolium apse of a villa, known as the Godmet farm, Tabarka. The images represent the estate in which the mosaics were located. Bardo Museum collection.



4.5 Reconstruction of the Chapel of the Martyrs based on the *Ecclesia Mater* mosaic image.



4.6 Sixth-century Western basilica of Latrun, plan. Layout showing an apse inscribed within a rectangular plan.



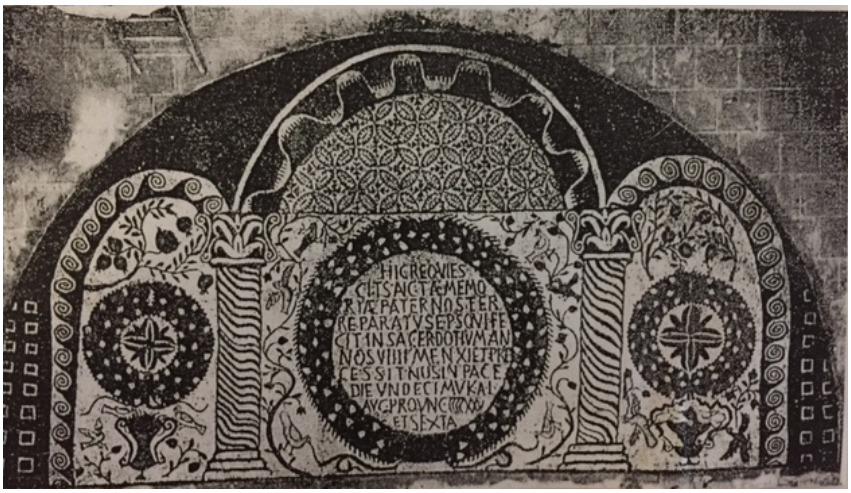
4.7 Fifth-century bronze openwork lamp, or polycandelon, cast in the shape of a basilica. Discovered in a sepulchre in Chlef. The ten branches shaped like elongated dolphins, held glass cups for the oil. Hermitage Museum, Basilewsky collection.

4.8 Fifth-century Capsella Africana: small silver casket depicting a young martyr on its lid, meant to store relics. Vatican Museum collection.

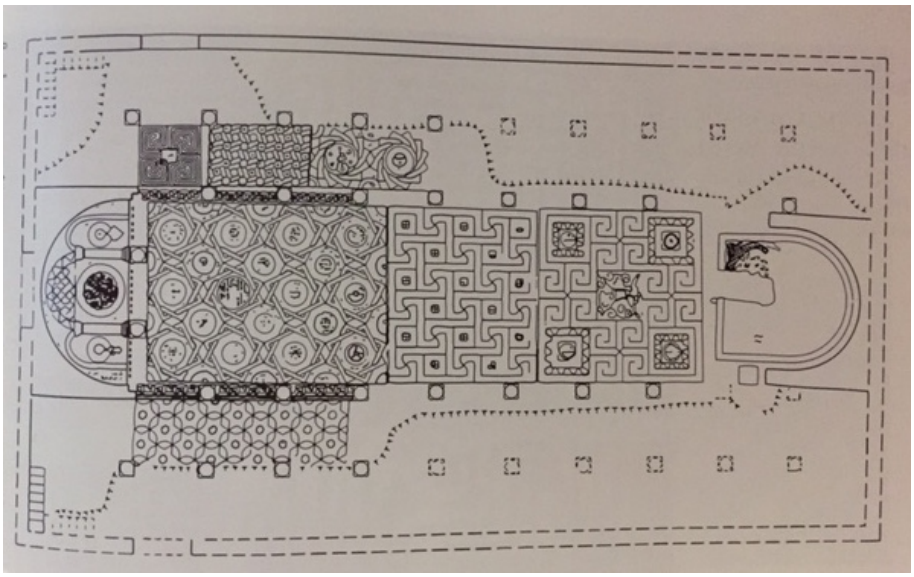
4.9 Capsella Africana detail: the openwork kiosk at one end of the silver casket. A similar image appears at the other end.

4.10 Fifth-century Capsella di Brivio: small silver and gold casket. Details showing Bethlehem and Jerusalem, represented by gated cities, at either end of the rounded end of the object. Louvres Museum collection.

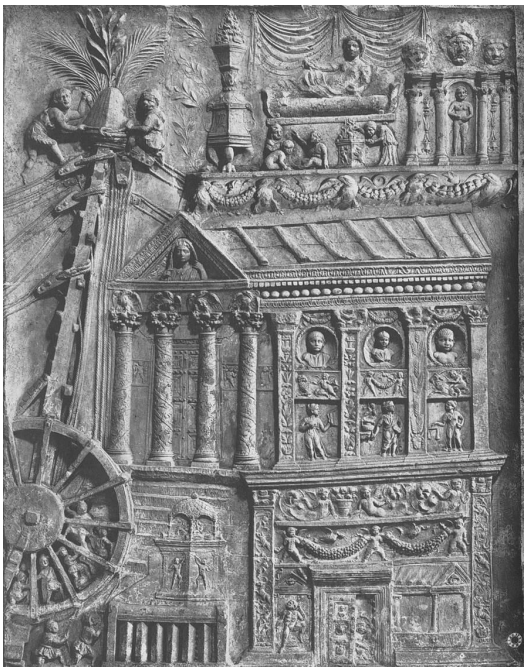
4.11 Mosaics depicting Bethlehem and Jerusalem in San Vitale basilica, Ravenna.



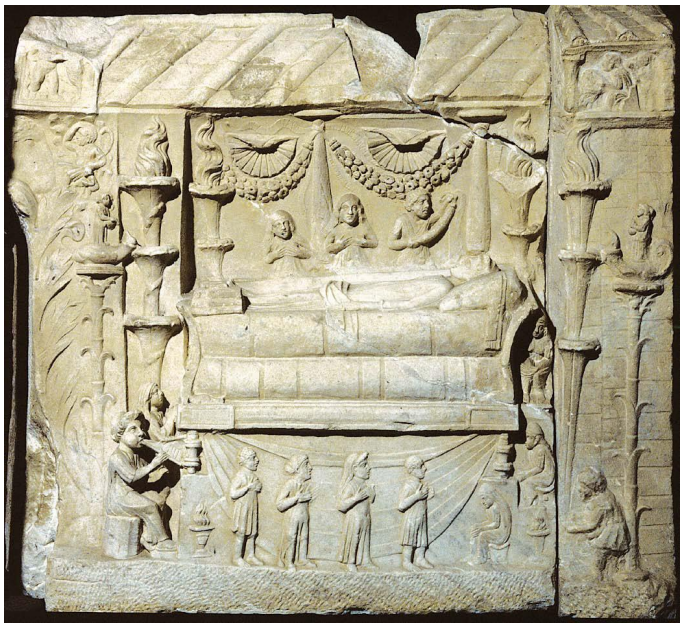
4.12 Fifth-century Reparatus Mosaic, located in the Chlef basilica, in Algeria.



4.13 Plan of the Reparatus Basilica in Chlef, Algeria, after changes to accommodate the Reparatus mosaic (during the fifth century), shown in the apse on the left. Also visible is the recreated mosaic pavement in the nave and side aisles, which exhibits an overall geometric design.



4.14 Second-century Tomb of the Haterii. Marble relief from the Via Labicana in Rome. This panel illustrates the tomb itself and how it was erected. Vatican Museum collection.



4.15 Mourning panel from the Tomb of the Haterii. Marble relief from the Via Labicana Rome. This panel depicts a more intimate mourning scene where the deceased lies on a funeral bier, surrounded by mourners, garlands and lit candles. The room also depicts multiple architectural details with a lack of perspective. Vatican Museum collection.

4.16 Julio-Claudian relief. Marble panel from the Ara Pietatis Augustae depicting the sacrifice of a bull in front of the Temple of Mars Ultor.

4.17 Fourth-century Carthage mosaic depicting a circus scene where various parts of the building are shown from multiple points of view, but on one pictorial plan.

4.18 Fifth-century mosaic of Dominus Iulius, from Carthage. The mosaic depicts the estate of Lord Julius who is shown, along with his wife, receiving the riches of the land. The central buildings representing the estate are shown from multiple perspective, simultaneously. Bardo Museum collection.

4.19 Third-century fresco depicting the consecration of the tabernacle. Dura Europos synagogue, West Wall.

4.20 Fifth-century original mosaic in Sta Sabina. The figures, located at either end of the dedicatory inscription, depict on the left, the Church of the Circumcised and on the right, the Church of the Gentiles.

5: **The Mosaic of Crescentinus**

5.1 Fifth-century Crescentinus mosaic panel from the Chapel of the Martyrs, in Tabarka. The top panel shows a busy composition with horsemen galloping amidst roses and birds. The *Dextera Dei* descends from the top, extending a wreath crown. The middle of the panel contains the inscription and identifies the tomb as that of deacon Crescentinus. The bottom panel shows a vessel and a Chi-Rho monogram, on the left side. Bardo museum collection.

5.2 Detail of the top panel of the Crescentinus mosaic.

5.3 Detail of the bottom panel of the Crescentinus mosaic. The orange arrow (right) indicates the Chi-Rho symbol and the prow of the boat can be seen farther to the left. The yellow arrow (left) shows what many have interpreted as a dolphin.

5.4 First or second-century Hand of Sabazius. This small bronze votive hand depicted the attributes of the deity and was meant to be fixed at the end of a pole to use during processions. British Museum collection.

5.5 Third-century BCE Dura Europos synagogue fresco depicting the crossing of the red sea. The *Dextera Dei* appears twice.

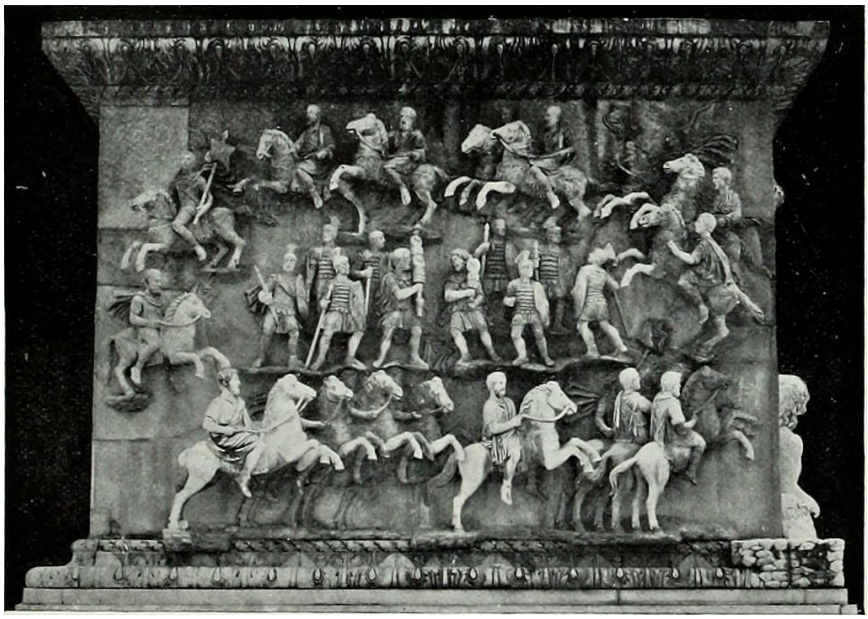
5.6 Sixth-century detail of the Beth'Alpha Synagogue pavement mosaic depicting the binding of Isaac and the *Dextera Dei*, indicated by the arrow.

5.7 Sixth-century centre medallion of the Beth' Alpha synagogue pavement mosaic depicting Sol in his quadriga. *In situ*.

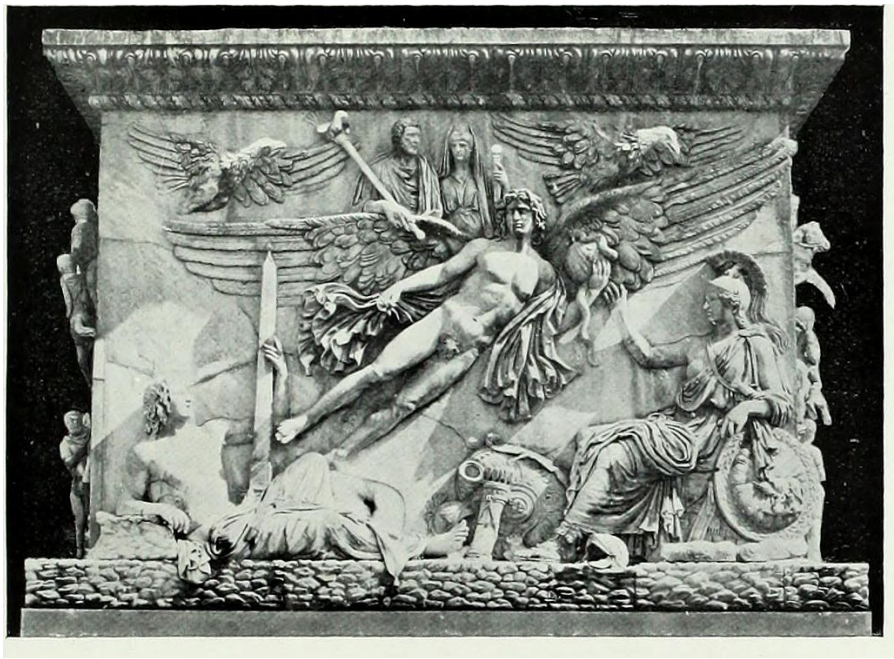
5.8 Severan Tondo from the Fayum showing the Emperor Septimius Severus and his family. Dated to 200, approximately. The family members wear gold wreaths and rich clothing.

5.9 Second- or third-century Fayum portrait showing a gold wreath atop the deceased's head, from the mummy case of Artemidorus the Younger. British Museum collection.

5.10 Victorious Charioteer Mosaic from Carthage. The winner holds a wreath and whip in his right hand and the palm in his left. Bardo Museum collection.



5.11 Rome, Antonine Column: *decursio* panel. Dated to 161.



5.12 Rome, Antonine Column: Apotheosis panel. Dated to 161.

5.13 Third- or fourth- century fresco depicting the binding of Isaac. The *Dextera Dei* has not survived damage in the upper left-hand side. Rome, Via Latina catacomb *in situ*.

5.14 Mosaic of the San Vitale basilica showing the *Dextera Dei* over Abel sacrificing a lamb and Melchizedek offering bread. Ravenna.

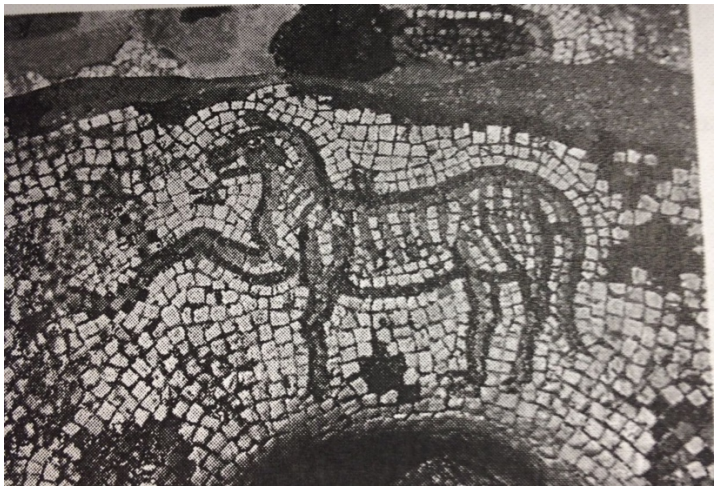
5.15 Fourth- or fifth-century sarcophagus. The side of the lid depicts a Chi-Rho symbol in a ribboned wreath, flanked by birds. Below, on the body of the sarcophagus, a lamb stands under an archway and on the source of the four rivers of Paradise. The lamb has a nimbus and represented Christ. Sant'Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna.

5.16 Fourth-century detail from a Column sarcophagus, with scenes of the Passion of Christ. This sarcophagus celebrates the triumph of resurrection through its depiction of the cross under a wreath, encircling the Chi-Rho symbol. Christ is crowned with the laurel wreath of victory by a Roman soldier in the left vignette. Museo Pio Cristiano collection, Vatican.

5.17 Fifth-century tomb covers in the Felix basilica, Demna. Mosaic tomb covers no. 25-26. The epitaphs are inscribed within wreaths surrounded by *cantharoi*, birds and roses. Photo *in situ*, mosaics now in the Bardo Museum collection.

5.18 San Vitale basilica, Ravenna. Mosaic depicting Justinian and his retinue.

5.19 Sant'Apollinare in Classe Basilica. Detail of the mosaic depicting a procession of apostles and saints, each carrying a wreath in their veiled hands.



5.20 Sixth-century baptism font mosaic. Detail from Sidi Jdidi Baptistery in Tunisia. This image, located on the lip of the baptism font depicts a lamb raising its right leg towards a wreath. *In situ*.

5.21. Fourth- or fifth-century sarcophagus depicting lambs flanking a cross, apocalyptic letters and date palms. Sant'Apollinare in Classe.

5.22 Third- or fourth-century catacomb fresco depicting Elijah taken up to God in a *quadriga*. Rome, Via Latina cubiculum B, *in situ*.

5.23 Third- or fourth-century ceiling mosaic from the vaulted tomb of the Julii under St Peter's basilica in Vatican City. The mosaic depicts Sol Invictus in his *quadriga*. The identification of the figure as Christ is unresolved.

5.24 Fourth-century sarcophagus of Stilicho: detail of the right side of the sarcophagus depicting Elijah taken up to God in a *quadriga*. Milan, S. Ambrogio basilica.

5.25 Fourth- or fifth-century apse mosaic of the St Aquilinus chapel depicting horses pulling a chariot across the sky, thought to be the ascension of Ezechiel. Milan, San Lorenzo basilica.

5.26 Fifth-century *Saint Thecla*, from Egypt, possibly Oxyrhyncus or nearby. Limestone, 3 ¾ x 25 ½ inches (9.5 x 64.8 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 48-10. Photo: Jamison Miller.

5.27 Tabarka, double tomb portrait mosaic (martyr's chapel), now in the Bardo museum, Tunis. Fifth-century example of a female *orant* from a funerary tomb cover in the Chapel of the Martyrs. Bardo Museum collection.

5.28 Fifth-century mosaic depicting Saint Victor, located in the apex of the dome in San Vittorio in Ciel D'Oro chapel. The saint is pictured in a ribboned wreath crown, on a gold background. The flame of the Spirit burns over his head. The wreath is composed of vegetal elements representing the Seasons and the passage of time. Milan, S. Ambrogio basilica.

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